

THE MYSTERY of
No.9,
STANHOPE STREET

A Romance of Real Life



by

Emma Hardinge Britten

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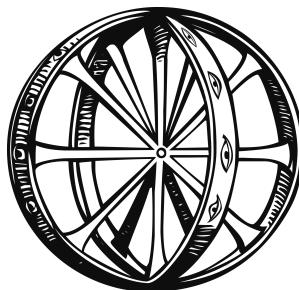
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Emma Hardinge Britten, *The Mystery of No. 9, Stanhope Street. A Romance of Real Life*.
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THE MYSTERY OF NO. 9, STANHOPE STREET

CHAPTER I.

Even on the very threshold of the history I am about to transcribe, methinks I hear the fairer and younger part of my readers say with an air of mingled scorn and indifference, as they glance at and then turn from the page that announces the above title, "Pshaw! I'm quite sure I shan't care to read that. Who ever heard of a mystery and a romance connected with a commonplace No. 9 and a commonplace street that nobody knows anything about, except that there's no such place in Belgravia or anywhere else that is known to anybody that is somebody."

Well, my fair critic, perhaps you are right; at least as far as you are capable of judging. But, my dear madam, be assured if you—"Asmodeus"-like—could peer into the recesses of many a commonplace street and number, and read the secrets of many a commonplace-looking inhabitant's heart therein, you would see more mysteries unveiled and more startling romances depicted in the real life of the unconsidered masses than ever fired the imaginations of the most romantic of fiction writers. Be patient then. Step with me into No. 9; cross the spacious hall, paved with diamond-shaped slabs of black and white marble, mostly worn away now to a uniform shabby grey; ascend with me the broad, once handsome mahogany stairway, worn into dents with the feet of past generations; linger on any landing you please, or climb up—up to the very top storey of all, and you may pick up anywhere or everywhere threads of vanished life, strange, and even weird enough to weave into a woof of history not unworthy of the title given to the following real life narrative.

THE INMATES AND WHEREABOUTS OF NO. 9, STANHOPE STREET.

The special inmate to whom we are about to introduce you, my readers, is Mr. Richard Stanhope, landlord and owner of No. 9 in the street to which we give his name, although we use that name for mere expediency. The street in question never was so called in reality, and is not so known now. It was once—a long, long time ago—a street lined on each side with large and handsome private houses, though now the tides of London fashion have drifted far away, leaving Stanhope Street and the Surrey side of the river, and surging away to the distant west end of the great modern Babylon. No. 9 some seventy to

eighty years ago was still in a quiet, “genteel” street, inhabited by respectable city men and their families, together with a few superior lodging-houses, mostly tenanted by those visitors from the provinces who made periodical trips to the Metropolis, and liked to return time and again to the same locality, considering the large and comfortable accommodation of Stanhope Street of more value than the narrow and costly apartments of the fashionable quarters of the city.

Considering that this same Surrey-side street was still the resort of well-to-do and respectable inhabitants, No. 9 was by no means regarded with favourable eyes by its immediate neighbours, either on its right or left hand. Truth to tell, it bore the reputation of being a very shabby, ill-kept, and ill-furnished lodging-house. Its tenants were chiefly poor clerks or employees whose means only enabled them to hire one room, and even those were generally persons engaged in the immediate neighbourhood, as the attractions of the house were not sufficient to ensure a “respectable connection.” Whether this decadence in the reputation of No. 9 Stanhope Street proceeded from the indifference or parsimony of its landlord, who lived on the premises himself, was not clearly proved. Only one woman was ever seen in connexion with the house, and she was advanced in life, unattractive in person, and so taciturn in manners that she was deemed by the gossips, who strove in vain to satisfy their neighbourly inquisitiveness by pumping her, “a sour, cross, old woman.” To every gossiping query her invariable answer was—“Ask Mr. Stanhope; he knows, I don’t.” As nobody *did* ask Mr. Stanhope, because, somehow, nobody cared to do so, nobody knew, and so, at last, the house fell into a kind of silent taboo that no one cared to investigate, either in the matter of cause or effect. Mrs. Marsh, the one and only feminine member of the establishment, was too old and plain to give cause for scandal; the lodgers, such as they were, too humble, and generally threadbare looking, to awaken any desire for their further acquaintance; and the reputed landlord or proprietor, Mr. Stanhope himself, looked, acted, and seemed generally too far away from everybody for anyone to try and intrude on his privacy. All that was known about him was that he was an artist. That he was young, handsome, reserved, and had been utterly unknown until a recent exhibition of paintings, at which one of his productions—how introduced, or by what means, nobody knew—had won a prize of—think of it, oh ye popularity hunters!—no less than five hundred pounds. The tidings were at first incredible. “What! an unknown man! Not even introduced by anyone that was anyone! Whatever could make the judges

assign a prize to such a person?" The answer was simple. The subject was Marie Antoinette of France going to execution. The treatment of this noble subject was so exquisitely touching, so beautiful, so real, with such a deep human pathos, but such a divine simplicity pervading the painting, like an aura, that there was not a single dissentient voice among the judges. Whether it was the critics, or the mere spectators, who looked on that picture, all eyes were riveted there, all hearts went out to it; and the prize—the highest that was at that time tendered—five hundred pounds, was at once awarded to the painter of this historical picture.

Some report of the young artist's success had reached even the magnates of Stanhope Street. Some wondered, some doubted, but as no change appeared in the unpainted door, the broken railings, time-worn steps, or cobwebbed windows of the lower floors of No. 9, curiosity died out for want of fire to feed its flame, and the artist and his success were things of the past of which no trace remained during the succeeding year.

Gossips are human institutions without which perhaps even humanity itself would die out. They exist everywhere, are the self-appointed news carriers of Society, whose special business is to find out other people's business, retail it out with their own variations, and first create and then feed upon the petty slanders, surmises, and senile tales they carry from place to place. They are, in a word, unpublished and totally unreliable newspapers; editors who, for want of genuine tidings of world-wide interest, gather up the garbage of gutters and slums contiguous to their own habitats, and peddle that out, to the infinite delight of their own busy tongues, and the discredit of all whom they wag the said tongues about.

Now Stanhope Street, like the rest of the world, had the benefit of some of these perambulating news manufacturers, and very shortly after the time when the splendid success of the young artist at No. 9 began to elevate him somewhat in the opinion of his neighbours, No. 40 opposite deemed it her bounden duty to pull said No. 9 down by reporting, first, that a large number of queer-looking women had been seen calling at his door, and finally, that two, a stout, middle-aged female and a closely-veiled slight ditto, were known to be constant visitors at the house.

Their hours of entrance in the mornings—twice a week at the least—and their departure after generally some three to four hours' stay, was all duly chronicled, but who they were, why they came, whither they went, etc., etc.,

was the first problem of which the Stanhope Street gossips deemed it "right and prudent" to discourse.

Their curiosity was a little abated and their interest cooled, when an old sign painter with whom they conversed, suggested that, as an artist, maybe he employed models, and that the elder might stand for Queen Anne, or the younger for the Queen of Sheba; or the two together mayhap might represent Beauty and the Beast; or some rich publican had belike given him a job, and the women in question were his sitters. From these suggestions, homely as they were, came the certainties which the gossips presently began to avow. There was no mystery at all in the case. The artist was a sign painter, and the females that frequented his studio were engaged by a well-known publican to act as sitters for the new sign of the Bible "Martha and Mary."

As we shall only get farther and farther afield by following up the "says he's" and "says she's" of that class who seldom, if ever, know anything that they prate about, save the words supplied them by that most untruthful of all "common liars"—to wit, common report—let us at once go to the fountain head; and after ascending four pairs of the broad, old, worn mahogany stairs, before described, pause to rest on the top landing, pass through a little, temporary partitioned-off entrance, neatly painted, and labelled "OFFICE (RING THE BELL)," and without waiting for an answer to the latter formality, push open the screen door, and enter at once upon a large front room, scantily furnished as a sitting-room. Arrived there we will pause before an old, tattered, chintz-covered arm chair, in which reclines the landlord and proprietor of No. 9, busily engaged in reading a letter. As the gentleman in question is not only No. 9 *in propria persona*, but also the hero whose fortunes we propose to follow, we shall give some preliminary details concerning the appearance which he presented when we first introduce him to our readers. We may say at once, that he was then twenty-five years of age, tall, graceful, well formed, with a singularly handsome face, well cut, even beautiful, features, almost feminine in delicacy and refinement of contour, with a noble head, thick, curling black hair, and large, deep brown, far away looking eyes, shaded by long, black lashes. He was attired in a rusty, threadbare-looking black velvet coat, and was altogether as picturesque and fascinating an appearing individual, as if he had but just stepped out of one of his own pictures, a collection of which might have been discerned through the half-opened door which divided the room wherein we first find him from a still larger apartment at the back of the house,

appropriated to the purposes of art. It may here be noted that No. 9 was a double house, and in its palmy days, doubtless, had been a fine and spacious mansion.

There were large parlours on each side of the street door, and these rooms, both back and front, extended all the way up on each floor. At the top, appropriated to the master of the place, there were therefore (as all through the building) four rooms—the one occupied by Mr. Stanhope as a sitting or office room, a large studio at the back of this, and across the passage a small bedroom and a back room, shut up and veiled from profane eyes by a door, closed for the present against Asmodeus's intrusion.

In the hand of the artist was, as before stated, an open letter, upon the pages of which he seemed to be deeply intent. Notwithstanding the fact that we are only intruders on the quiet and seclusion of that lofty retreat, we are still able peer so clearly over the reader's shoulder that we can transcribe the contents of that letter, which read as follows:—“Rome, ——, 18—, Dear old friend and fellow student,—It is long since I have been able to write to you, press of really urgent business occupying my time, to the utter exclusion of all friendly or personal interests. I have been—as you, dear friend, have suggested in your last esteemed favour, dated——, I am ashamed to say more than twelve months ago—eminently successful in my profession; in fact, the demands for my pictures have far exceeded my capacity, both in point of time and strength, for their production. It is at this crisis of my history that I not only remember the young lad whom it was alike my pride and pleasure to call pupil, but for whose talents I ventured to predict—even in the earliest days of our acquaintance—a bright, I may say a most brilliant, career. Whether as a prophet, or as one of my early academical chums and well-loved associates, I have no words to tell you with what delight I read of your success in winning the grand prize of the London Art Exhibition some twelve months ago. Your letter of modest acknowledgment of this great achievement has followed me from place to place, and only reached me at my headquarters in Rome six months after date. Since that time, an imperative demand for rest, some cessation from labour, and an earnest desire once more to revisit my native country and the scenes of my youth and early academical studies, have determined me to accept a long-standing invitation to visit my only living relatives, my uncle and aunt, at Twickenham. Now, Dick, dear old, young, but ever-beloved friend, fellow-student and pupil, as sure as my name is Reginald Balfour, I mean to take you back with me to Rome. I don't exactly know when

I shall start for England, so I don't propose to send this long scrawl till just before I do so; hence then, you may expect to see me almost as soon as this arrives, and—”

Hark! what was that? A ring—and a hasty one—of the bell; the partition screen of entrance is pushed back, a gentleman in foreign costume enters, crying, in agitated tones, “Richard Stanhope!” “Reginald Balfour, my friend, my brother, welcome!”

CHAPTER II.

Long and earnest was the conversation that followed the exchange of greetings between the two friends whose meeting we recorded at the close of the last chapter. Reginald Balfour might have been some ten, or even more, years older than his "academical chum," as he delighted to designate Richard Stanhope, but the warm friendship which the two artists had conceived for each other in their early days of study was enhanced by the fact that the father of Richard Stanhope had given young Reginald a home when, as an orphan lad, he was struggling alike with poverty and the irrepressible impulse which led him up to the metropolis to pursue his studies in the "divine art," as he termed it, to which he had determined to devote his life and talents. In return for this kindness Reginald gave all his spare time to his kind patron's young son, whose enthusiasm for the profession of an artist was his natural inheritance, his father having already won some fame as a portrait painter, and being an academician in good standing.

Whether bound to each other by home associations, ties of mutual kindness, or a similarity of tastes, the two young students were united by far more fraternal feelings than those that oftentimes prevail between blood relations, and when Richard Stanhope ultimately became an Academy student, his "big brother," as Reginald Balfour called himself, was equally his preceptor in the rules of art and his protector against the all too human tendencies of the strong to bully and oppress their weaker and younger compeers.

In process of time and the "logic of events" Reginald Balfour was induced to visit Italy, and there where his talents, like the sword of power which cuts its way to success, opened up to him the avenues to fame and honour, he had lived for several past years. From time to time the fraternal intercourse with his quondam pupil friend was continued by correspondence, but it was evident to both writers that there were heart mysteries yet to be explored which neither dare trust to mere correspondence.

One grand fact of their warm and fraternal intercourse had been recorded and fully dwelt upon. The father of Richard Stanhope, and the adopted father and friend of Reginald's orphaned years, had passed away and left his young son alone. Like many another devotee of art, he had spent all his means on the one supreme object of his life—the mistress of his soul—his art; hence, when

he died, he had nothing left to bequeath to his son but the large No. 9, Stanhope Street house, which, in his palmy days, he had purchased in the hope that in its size and central situation he could make it a school for young students who had no other means to help them in the pursuit of their art than an organized charitable institution.

Having "passed on" without leaving enough in his great house to pay for decent funeral expenses, the artist father, who lived in the clouds, died, whilst the poor young son, who lived upon just what he could turn into pence or else on credit, found himself the inheritor of No. 9, Stanhope Street, and nothing else, if we except the services of the old-time domestic of the family, Mrs. Marsh, who was still there, and who volunteered to stay and serve the young master without pay till better times should come again.

Long and earnest, then, were the confidential words passing between the two young men, but still—by the hard lines of earthly travail—old friends, now met in No. 9, Stanhope Street.

The reviews, recollections, regrets, and promises of future revelations were at length interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Marsh, who, with a faded black cap on her head, a faded old merino gown on her worn form, but with a very solemn and respectful tone and attitude, knocked at the door, and on opening it announced, first, "din——", then, interrupting herself (in view of the quality of the provender she had to offer), she added—"tea is ready, gentlemen."

"Come on, Reginald!" cried Richard, cheerily, and together they descended the stairs to the lowest floor, where, in a small room known as "the housekeeper's apartment," a meal was provided, consisting of tea (in a cracked teapot), sugar (in a ditto basin), "cream"—a sky blue liquid so called; ham (bacon), and four fried eggs; still there were green leayes around the dish as garnish (probably gathered from the weeds in the back-yard); two kinds of plates (both cracked); two bottles of ale; two different kinds of glasses (also cracked), and two penny pies on "a sideboard," as Mrs. Marsh called her old ironing board, rigged up for the occasion by one of Mrs. Marsh's—under garments, white, and tightly drawn across the board. There was also, to complete the feast, a new loaf, to be cut by a knife that would persist in coming out of the handle.

To Dick Stanhope this display of aristocratic order and *regime* passed unnoticed. He was too indifferent, and too ordinarily abstracted, to observe what a wonderful attempt at display his poor housekeeper had organized. Not

so Mr. Reginald Balfour, the now successful and wealthy proprietor of a luxurious suite of apartments in a Roman palazzo. He took in the entire situation at a glance, but, reserving all remarks for a future occasion, submitted to be solemnly waited on by the Major-ess Domo—Mrs. Marsh—just as if it had been an alderman's feast presided over by a Lord Mayor, and waited on by a hundred Guildhall flunkies.

After the two penny fruit pies had been served up for dessert, and the host's abstracted suggestions that they should go to the drawing-room (*i.e.* the third floor, top rooms) had been followed out, Mr. Reginald Balfour, in his own somewhat commanding but impulsive way, addressed his host as follows:—

"Dear old fellow,—I wish now to serve you, as you and the dear father who is gone—God bless him—have served me. Would you object to tell me how you are situated, and—." Here he stopped, seeming to choke up physically or mentally, or both, in such a way as to prevent his proceeding.

Without noticing his friend's agitation, Richard, in his dreamy way, went on to tell how, on the good father's death, it was found there was nothing left but his pictures, his ragged everyday clothes, his academical dress suit, and that house. "My father," he said, "missed my mother. I have often heard him say women were life's better side, and without them men might steer their way so far as the world in its external respects were concerned, but woman was the soul as well as the QUEEN of the home, and if she were not there—why—there was no home at all. Ah, me! I think this is true," he added, "but no matter. My good father died, and it took all I could scrape together to bury him. Somehow, I don't know why, the Academy claimed all his pictures, and there were so many debts to pay, debts for paints and canvas, and all sorts of things, that at last I wrote to my uncle, Sir Lester Stanhope, and asked him if he could help or even advise me what to do, but—but—I hardly know how to tell even you, Reginald—that man, my father's own brother, sent me back a curse. Yes, Reginald, a bitter curse, and said he was *glad* his enemy was dead, and he hoped I'd soon follow him. As to my prospects," he added, "I might starve before he would stretch out a hand to help me."

Here the young man buried his face in a very ragged pocket-handkerchief, and strove in vain to stifle a choking sob.

"Look here, Dick," began his friend in a somewhat broken voice, "do you remember your mother?"

"Very slightly," replied Stanhope. "You know I was but a little fellow when

that terrible event happened, but the circumstances attending it I remember as well as if they occurred but yesterday. It was just such a dark day, and pelting rain storm, as it is now," glancing up at the streaming window. "I remember, oh how vividly, the blue forked lightnings flashing through the room where my mother sat sewing; and how, when one terrific peal of thunder burst over the house, as I thought rending it to pieces, how I ran to hide my head in my precious mother's sheltering arms, when lo! there she lay on the floor, cold and still. I don't know who it was that came in answer to my wild cries to my mother to awake! To awake! to awake, alas! from the sleep that knows no waking. All the rest seems like an unquiet dream from which I only awoke when they pointed her out to me, lying so still and white and motionless on that very couch out yonder, Reginald, and told me she was dead—killed, as I have since heard, by a stroke of lightning."

"I was away in the country on that fatal day, Dick," said his companion in a low voice, "but I remember well seeing her when I returned, as she lay in her coffin, and thinking how wondrously beautiful she was, and what a beautiful marble statue she would have made."

"Yes," rejoined Stanhope. "I heard the watchers say that; for my part, I did not then know what death was, but I did know that she was very beautiful, and I can tell you this, Reginald, that I dream of her, both asleep and awake, and though she never looks white and stiff, as I last remember her, when laid on that couch, I thought she had turned to a marble statue, so that I was almost afraid to look at her, yet now, when I dream of her, *asleep and awake*—for *awake* I seem to see her, aye, and hear her talk—why, good heavens! I don't think angels can be more lovely or more sweet; and I often wish I was an angel, too, like her."

"Well, now, I'll tell you all about it, old fellow," said Reginald Balfour. "That mother of yours was once engaged to be married to your uncle—that same Sir Lester Stanhope that sent you his curse, and the trouble was that somehow or other she preferred the other brother to her betrothed, and so, what did she do, but she went and jilted him and married your father. Now, you see, Dick, that's a sort of thing that no fellow could stand, especially when the first fellow was madly in love with a girl and the second fellow that carried her off was the first one's brother—don't you see?"

"Of course, I do," replied Richard. "But, Reginald, do you remember my mother's features?"

"I should think I did," answered his friend. "She acted a mother's part to me, and I would know her beautiful face among a thousand."

"If you remember her so well, then, Reginald," rejoined Stanhope, "tell me, does that face resemble hers at all?"

So saying, he arose; and drawing aside a curtain from a number of sketches, some of which hung on the wall of the inner room, and some stood on the floor, he was about to direct his friend's attention to one in particular, when Balfour rushed forward and, pointing to an exquisite painting of a female face on a stretched canvas, placed on a stand, he cried—

"There—there! that is the *fac-simile* of your beautiful mother, exactly as I remember her! I have admired her too well and too often ever to forget her."

"That may indeed be the face of my dead mother," replied the artist in a low, solemn tone, "for it is a vision that has appeared to me sleeping or waking for years past. It was to incarnate and give life and reality to that vision that I painted the portrait—or rather the ideal sketch—of Marie Antoinette going to execution. It was the incarnation of that beloved dream face upon canvas that procured me the splendid prize I took at the Academy Exhibition."

"It is your beautiful mother's portrait, nevertheless, I tell you, Richard Stanhope," said his visitor, passionately. What more he would have said was at once interrupted by the storm that had so long been raging, and now burst in might over the scene.

The room in which the young men stood became illumined by a succession of vivid flashes of lightning, followed by a loud and heavy peal of thunder.

Amidst the obscurity of the evening, deepening almost into Cimmerian darkness in the gloom of the storm, the continuous gleams of the forked lightning revealed another form which seemed to have appeared weirdly and suddenly enough to have descended from the skies in a very chariot of fire, yet the apparition which now presented itself to the gaze of the two amazed observers had nothing terrible in its aspect, for it was the form of a woman, tall, graceful, and of surpassing loveliness. She wore, or seemed to wear, a robe of dazzling whiteness, illumined as if with streams as of liquid silvery fire by the flashing lightning. Her face was the *fac-simile* of the beautiful unframed painting on the stand; in fact, so perfect was the similitude that the young men might have deemed the whole vision a mere illusion but for the speaking gaze of deep and apparently soul-felt tenderness with which the lustrous eyes were fixed on young Stanhope's. Was it the glare of the lightning playing over this

wondrous form, or was it indeed a reality? But now she seems to bend forward—nearer, nearer yet! Another instant, and that face will be pressed to his; those eyes will pour their insufferable gleams of light into his own burning eyeballs! He must break the spell or die. "My mother, oh, my mother!" he cried.

"Alicia Stanhope, by heavens," shouts his friend, and then the spell *is* broken; the sudden roar of the storm subsides; the muttering thunder dies off in the distance; the last streak of the vivid lightning only leaves the scene in deeper obscurity than ever; the angel of the storm has vanished, and nothing remains in the dimness of the evening shades closing fast around them save the cowering forms of the awe-struck watchers, the dim outline of the painted faces on the walls—might, silence, and the faint beat of two fastly throbbing hearts.

CHAPTER III.

For several succeeding days after the evening meeting between the two artist friends described in the last chapter, Reginald Balfour made daily pilgrimages into town from Twickenham, where he was visiting some near relations, and hastening at once to No. 9, Stanhope Street, he seemed impelled to linger around his old friend, no doubt hindering his work, but still seemingly moved by an impulse he could not resist, to spend some hours each day in young Stanhope's studio. In their first interview he had stated that one of his chief motives in coming to England was the hope of inducing his friend to sell off and leave that dreary old Stanhope Street house, and come to live at Rome with him or near him, just as he—the said Richard Stanhope—should elect. Why this desire so moved him, except as a matter of friendship, he did not seem able to explain until the end of the first week of his daily visits. Then, as if screwing up his courage to the fulfilment of some protracted and difficult purpose, he suddenly exclaimed, almost immediately after entering Richard's studio:

"Look here, Dick, I'm bound to return to Italy in a few days; before the end of next week, in fact. So this thing had better be settled at once."

"What thing, Reginald?" replied Stanhope, in his usual dreamy way.

"Why, about going back to Rome with me, old fellow. Come now! I'll pay all expenses—say you'll go."

First plunging both hands wildly into his thick, brown curls, as if to collect together the brain matter beneath, and thus to apprehend the astonishing nature of his friend's proposition, Richard Stanhope, after a few moments of silent bewilderment, seemed to have become equally master of himself and the situation. Then, pointing to the only comfortable seat in the room, a big, old, faded-cushioned armchair, he bade his friend, with something like a tone and attitude of dignified authority, to be seated, and placing himself in another chair opposite to his visitor, he spoke as follows:

"I believe, Reginald, you are the only friend I have in the world, and as such, I think it would make me both happier and more settled if I should tell you just how I am situated and what are my present aims in life. I have written you all about that five hundred pounds prize I won for my *Marie Antoinette* picture, and no doubt, my friend, you think that after such a stroke of luck as

that, I ought to be living in rather a better style, and with more pleasant surroundings than you see here; but, Reginald, brother of my heart, I want to tell you how it all is."

"Go on, dear fellow," responded Balfour. "Only if you don't mind, I'll just light a cigar—have one?"

A shake of the hand from his *vis-à-vis*, the stroke of the match, and the first puff of "the flagrant weed" intervening, and then the master of No. 9 proceeded as follows:

"Ever since my good father's death, Mrs. Marsh—an angel in disguise, Balfour, though you may not know it—this Mrs. Marsh, then, has let various rooms in this big old deserted house by way of making an income for me. She has let the rooms to poor clerks that can't afford to pay much, but want a respectable home, and every week she has brought me the room rents, and on that we have lived just as the blessed creature has arranged, and the little surplus that I could save over the bread and cheese and the taxes I have spent on models."

"Models!" almost screamed the visitor, half rising from his chair; then subsiding again he re-lighted his cigar and added, in an undertone, "Go on."

"Well, Reginald, models, you know, are necessary for artists, and must be paid for. One day, as I was passing a hairdresser's shop the thought just occurred to me that Mrs. Marsh (my household angel, you know, Reginald) had told me I looked like a wild man of the woods, and ought to have my hair cut. I was about to enter the shop, when from its dingy portals there emerged two women. The first of these was an ordinary-looking, stout personage; the second, a young, slim, graceful creature, a very angel. Good heavens! I thought, as she came out, what a lovely picture she would make! Reginald, has it ever occurred to you that poets, musicians, artists, and perhaps all other human beings that are endowed with special faculties, are liable to live under the domination of that one faculty at the expense of their other mental powers? I believe this, and sometimes think that what we call genius in one particular direction is apt to unbalance the general equilibrium of our minds. Do you follow me?"

Balfour nodded his head emphatically.

"Believing thus, Reginald, I may perhaps account for my own want of practical apprehension of life and its duties by finding my whole soul absorbed

in the love of the beautiful, the picturesque, even the horrible and revolting, provided only it suggests to me a fine subject for an artistic representation. I will not digress by telling you how I have rushed off to fires, mobs, all sorts of sensational scenes, to gather in ideal scenes for this poor brain of mine to feed on. Sometimes, dear boy, I have talked of this most ridiculous idiosyncrasy with musicians, and they have reconciled me to my absurd self by assuring me they were just as *one idea-ed* on the subject of sounds, tunes, histories, tragedies, and comedies in musical rhythm—in a word, they, the musicians, seem to interpret life by tone, artists by form and colour. It may be so with all specialists, and the wise Dispenser of all gifts may have thus ordained it to make the individuals of life dependent on mutual interchange between the whole, and the whole dependent on specialties amongst its parts. But I am digressing. Reginald, if ever there was fascination—call it love, if you will, at first sight—it was when I saw that most beautiful creature I spoke of following her coarse companion out of the hairdresser's shop. Abandoning at once my original intention of entering the shop, and led by a sort of resistless fascination, I followed these women through many of the streets of Southwark until they turned into an alley filled with back doors of little gardens. At one of these they stopped, when the elder woman took out of her pocket a key, opened one of these little garden doors, and the two passed in, locking the door, as I distinctly heard, behind them. In the twinkling of an eye I counted the number of houses in the row, and almost rushed round the lane to the thoroughfare in which I knew the front of the house must be. It was not, as I expected, a small place, but a large, double house. Cigars were exposed for sale in one window, newspapers and periodicals in the other. Entering the shop, which was empty, I bought a cigar from the very woman—the elder one, I mean—who came in to serve me. Day after day I frequented that shop, but never saw nor was served by the angel I had looked upon at first. One day, under an impulse I could not resist, I wrote a letter, in which I related what I had seen at the hairdresser's door—stated that I was an artist—wanted a model for a great picture I wished to paint, and deliberately asked if, for a handsome consideration, the beautiful young woman I had seen would consent to be that model. I was stimulated to make this offer chiefly from the fact that the cigar shop was in a very low neighbourhood, and yet attended by some young and fashionable-looking men, who deliberately passed through the shop, entered by a door beyond, and seemed to remain there, at any rate not for a long time, as I found by waiting outside and unobserved near the shop. At

length, by careful inquiries in the neighbourhood, I ascertained that this house was kept by a man and woman who had a billiard saloon; that young and inexperienced men came there to learn and practise the game, and that the shop was merely a blind to cover the real purpose of the house. The strangest part of all this was, that nobody in that neighbourhood seemed to know anything about any young and beautiful woman who lived in the house. The gossips said the people had only just come there. They wished they had stayed away, for the house bore no very good name. Rows and disturbances were often heard there, and not unfrequently the police had been called in—but of the golden-haired girl for whom I inquired no one could tell me anything. Notwithstanding all this, there was a wild, irresistible impulse in my own being which determined me to write as I did to that woman—Mrs. Baillie, as I found her name was. Somehow I knew, by a sixth sense I have (whether you, my friend, know of its existence and working or not), that I should have a favourable answer."

"A sixth sense. Intuition, I suppose, you mean, eh, Dick?" said his listener between his cigar puffs. "All right; I know all about it. Everyone has it, but few heed it as you and I do. Go on."

"Be it what it may, Reginald, I know this sixth sense is a stronger motor power than even reason or sensuous perception, and under its prompting I wrote to Mrs. Baillie, confident that I should receive a favourable answer. The result proved the truth of my perceptions. Mrs. Baillie called upon me the next morning; stated that she was the widow of a Frenchman, and herself an Italian by birth. Her name had been Morani, and—"

"Morani!" almost screamed Reginald Balfour, starting from his seat; then violently checking himself, he said in a hoarse whisper, "Go on; the plot thickens!"

"Yes, Morani," added Stanhope, without remarking his friend's agitation. "She had married a Frenchman—one Baillie—and by him had a son, who when grown to manhood kept that house, and the business his father had founded. She had also, just before her husband's death, had a daughter, Adina, a girl who grew up to be so wonderfully beautiful that she and her son, Fernando Baillie, determined she should not be generally exposed to the public gaze in that low neighbourhood. Meantime—as the woman calling herself Mrs. Baillie said in a kind of horrid, furtive way, which throughout her talk had greatly troubled me—times were bad, business scarce, and in that low

neighbourhood the right kind of customers seldom, if ever, came; so she had consulted with her son, and both had come to the conclusion that if they could get a *real good engagement* for Adina, they would be willing to let her sit, stand, or do anything in the way of being an artist's model.

"We are the more impelled to this course, sir," said my visitor, "because Addie, as we call her, has an elder sister in Italy, who lived at Padua with my brother, a priest, sir—a priest of the true Church, sir. And this good brother of mine, Father Pierre, when my husband made me come to England to live, offered to adopt our eldest child, Maddalena, and bring her up as his niece should be brought up. Well, sir, we were young, and going to seek our fortune in a strange land, so we agreed to our brother's wish, and left our little Maddalena with him. Poor brother!" added the narratress, with a sigh. "He has become blind, and cannot any longer perform his functions as a priest, so Maddalena, who became—as we learned from friends—very beautiful, has earned her own bread and that of her old uncle's by becoming an artist's model."

"Yes, I know that," interrupted Balfour in an undertone.

"Do you, indeed, Reginald," rejoined Stanhope; "I am glad to hear you say that—another link between us, old fellow. Shake hands!"

"On with your tale, Dick," replied the other, moodily.

"Well, Reginald, to make a long story short, I did agree to give 'good terms,' especially after I had seen the model. She came with her mother, according to promise, the next day, and when she removed her hat and wrappings, and stood in a simple white close-fitting dress, with her beautiful shower of long, waving, light golden hair streaming down her back without shading her tall, graceful form, I declare to you, Reginald, it was only with difficulty that I could restrain my emotions sufficiently to prevent my falling at her feet to worship her as a Madonna."

"Have you ever been a model—an artist's model, I mean—fair maid," I said, hesitatingly, fairly overcome by her beauty.

"No, sir," she replied, in a soft, sweet voice, "but my sister in Padua has been one, so I know something of what is wanted, as she writes to mother about it."

"What forms has your sister sat for?" I enquired.

"The Virgin, that is—Madonnas—Venus, and Eve."

"Just so," I rejoined, "I shall require you for Eve."

"One hundred pounds the first standing," broke in the mother, in a loud, firm, business-like tone, "and twenty pounds each standing afterwards; I to accompany her at all times; a private room to dress and undress in, a fire in the studio all the time, and strict secrecy about who the model is."

"Now, Reginald, I confess that at first the harsh, detestable tone and manner in which these terms were enunciated, so grated on my nerves that I could hardly answer her, but when I looked upon the lovely face and form standing before me—the perfect innocence of the large deep blue eyes gazing into mine—noted the clause that the mother was always to accompany her; and, furthermore, when the mother blurted out, as if in a hurry, that these were the terms they always paid in Italy for Venuses, Eves, etc.—*nude* models—I was paralyzed, and had not a word of dissent or objection to offer. Besides this, it was not the terms I objected to—it was, somehow, the thought of that refined, almost angelic looking creature standing as a model for an Eve; and, must I confess the fact? something terribly repellent in connecting that angel form with the coarse sinister looking woman that poured out her glib talk of terms in that bargaining way."

"The terms were all right?" murmured the visitor.

"Right or wrong," pursued the narrator, I told the trading mother to make whatever arrangements she deemed best, assured of my compliance. I knew and felt that money was mere dross and a worthless commodity compared to the rare, wondrous—nay divine incarnation of beauty that then stood before me.

"I thought then—as I might almost venture to say I have since found it—that such beauty of form could scarcely be more than an earthly blossom, and that the mind could not, in the nature of heavenly justice and equilibrium, keep pace with such an exterior. I know not—I cannot even now say it is so, or whether I am right or wrong. This exquisite flower—this Adina of mine—is very kind, gentle, obedient, but so strangely silent. She never speaks except in monosyllables, and in answer to me or her *masterful*, determined mother. She always comes closely veiled, and always in company with that same soldierly mother. I have sketched her in many ways—represented her lovely form and face in all sorts of fantasies. In my last picture, a very large and choice one, either the *chef-d'œuvre* of my life or its first, last, and overwhelming failure, she stands as—as the mother of mankind, Eve, with the serpent."

So saying, the now thoroughly aroused, enthusiastic, and noble-looking

artist strode up to the curtain which hung across the folding doors dividing the front and back rooms, swung back that curtain with the triumphant air of a victor in an ancient gladiatorial combat, and pointing to an immense picture which stood facing the two lookers on, cried: "Behold my angel!"

The picture thus presented to view represented a scene of embowering trees and flowers of strange form, but exquisite though most delicately-shaded colouring. Long avenues, carpeted by flowery grasses, and overarched by bending trees stretching away into the very clouds, were penetrated and illumined by brilliant rays of sunbeams, colouring up the entire wilderness of exquisite beauty with diversified hues of gold and purple, and glittering on falling cascades and streams winding through the wonderful landscape in sparkling radiance. Half shaded by clustering bushes and rare blossoms, appeared a lovely female form, glowing in snowy beauty half revealed, and putting aside with exquisite grace long waving tresses of shimmering gold, the better to fix her wondering gaze upon a vast coiled up serpent standing erect in the midst of a group of flowery bushes, opposite the fair vision of the fabled *mother of mankind*, and fixing its sparkling sinister eyes full on that lovely being.

One of the grandest triumphs of this wonderful picture was that this reptilian form conveyed to every beholder the impression of human intelligence in the very act of speaking, whilst an equally irresistible sentiment of conviction seemed to pervade the veiled yet nude and unexceptionably modest angel of the flowery bushes—gleaming in her eager, large, azure eyes, and revealing eloquently in her bending form—that she was listening.

The picture was at once a marvel of history, revelation, and artistic perfection. After a long and almost breathless pause of admiration the visitor murmured—"Matchless! Perfect! Supermundane! And is this, then, modelled from your Adina?"

"Even so," replied Stanhope.

"How unlike her sister!" was the rejoinder.

"Do you then know Maddelena Morani?" asked Stanhope.

"Slightly," rejoined Balfour. "She is only my wife. But come, Dick, don't start or express such surprise, perhaps horror. Veil this wondrous picture and wondrous beauty of yours. Come and sit down again, and I will tell you a strange history, one that concerns yourself as much as your friends. Are you ready?"

CHAPTER IV.

Long and far into the night sat the two friends, conversing on their several experiences, after the master of the house had carefully veiled and shut away from sight the wonderful picture of Eve and the Serpent which we attempted, though most imperfectly, to describe in the last chapter. The substance of the mutual revelations interchanged in many hours' converse between the friends we shall endeavour to condense into the following dialogue.

Reginald Balfour: "You told me, Dick, that on your father's death you wrote to your uncle, Sir Lester Stanhope, asking his help in settling up your father's affairs. At what place did you address him, may I ask?"

Richard Stanhope: "At his castle of St. David's, in Wales."

R. B.: "Did you know that for some years past he has lived abroad?"

R. S.: "I cannot say I know this. I have heard as much, but only casually, and by report. I do not even know where he has now taken up his abode."

R. B.: "Well, Dick, I do; and as that knowledge has had a considerable deal of influence on my life and fortunes, and—at least I am in hope, if not in certainty—may have the same on yours, I commence what I have to tell by speaking first of him. The fact is, Dick, this crusty old relative of yours was, as perhaps you know, an enthusiastic devotee of art, and at one time president of the London Art Gallery, or some such association (I forget its name, I having lived so many years abroad). Do you know this? [Stanhope nodded.] Well, I only learned all about it when he came to live in Florence, just after he had succeeded, it seems, to a baronetcy and a fortune by the death of some intervening heirs, and ascended from plain Mr. Stanhope to be Sir Lester."

R. S.: "Just so, Reginald; what then?"

R. B.: "Why, this—that, leaving the field of professional art for that of amateur, and being, as you know, a devout Catholic, Sir Lester took to art of what he called a sacred character, and presuming that the old vagrants and adventuresses that the Catholic Church made into saints and saintesses were all sacred, and far better because they lived a few hundred years ago than the good men and women of our own time, so he—the said Sir Lester—under the influence of that priestly discernment which has such a wonderful eye for rich men, was induced to fill his beautiful Florentine Palazzo with all sorts of

daubs brought to him under the name of sacred art. I havn't time now to tell you of the horrid things this devotee of monkish trickery has stuck upon his walls—fried saints, grilled saints, drowned saints, and saints crucified head downwards cover every inch of space in your devout uncle's dwelling, and he himself, as I am credibly informed, wears out at the knees no less than one pair of trousers a week crawling from one horrible image to another on his marrow bones."

R. S.: "Spare your jokes on the poor old man, dear boy. He, as I have heard, is a fierce Catholic; you, as I know, are a no less fierce infidel. Why censure so harshly what you do not understand?"

R. B.: "Stop a bit, my dear fellow, and just hear me a moment. If I am an infidel to the religion of Priestcraft and baseless humbug, the devotees of such Munchausen fables are infidels to me. I profess the religion of Reason. I don't know who or what created me, except my mother and father, and being endowed with reason, I presume that endowment means use, and as long as I use my reason and it is convicted of any truth, that is my religion. Outside of my said reason all that claim to teach what they cannot prove are 'infidels' to me, just as much as I am to them."

R. S.: "Still. Reginald, your reason should tell you that there are mysteries of mind, thought, special genius and inspiration that mere reason cannot touch, cannot explain or account for. There are other worlds than this, my friend—a life beyond this life, the realities of which we sometimes see or feel or hear of in glances and glimpses, and of which some favoured ones know more than others, who boast of measuring everything in the vast, vast, unknown universe by their poor sensuous perceptions, called by them 'reason.' Reason! Good Heaven! I have had an inner life—aye, and will have more—in which the *reason* that seems to grow out of the infinitesimally small modicum of life that the senses can inform us of, can tell me nothing. But forgive me, my friend. I interrupt your narrative with my waking dreams."

R B.: "Well, dear boy, let us proceed on ground we can tread in common. Your uncle, '*Milor Stanhope*,' as the Italians call your rich uncle, having made a visit to Rome, the tidings went abroad in our artistic circles that he wanted 'to begin from the beginning,' and e'en desired to have the picture of Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the talking serpent; and, moreover, that to any artist who should paint a picture of these illustrious parties on a canvas just so wide and so broad, with a vivid delineation of the Garden of Eden just as it was when

the world began—or, at any rate, just as the artist fancied that it was—
whoever, in a word, should be successful in the production of such a picture as
ten of the best Italian artists out of twenty-five should give their verdict for,
should receive for said Garden of Eden and its inhabitants, five thousand
pounds. Now, Dick, you have been reading me a kind of diatribe lesson against
making mere human reason the only standard of guidance in this battle of
earthly life of ours. I am quite sure you are right, for if ever there was a true
disciple of unreason, that fellow now sits before you in my particular shape. As
a proof of this, what must possess my foolish brain but the determination to
enter into competition for this very prize of *Milor Stanhope's*.

"I had been and am, fairly successful both in figure and landscape painting,
but somehow it was no sense of my own abilities or even a bare suspicion that
I could win the prize, but it was an impulse that never left me, day or night,
waking or sleeping, I might almost say; that I *must* compete for it—nay, more,
idiot that I was! It came to me, like a voice telling me so, that Sir Lester would
payout into my very hands the banknotes that amounted to five thousand
pounds. Laugh at me if you will, Richard, but positively I could any day during
the last three years have sat down and painted that Sir Lester, whom at that
time I had never seen, counting out into my hands the banknotes, all in
hundred pounds, which I was to carry off, for this prize. Well, you smile, of
course, but never mind. Let me get on with my story. Now, the first thing
wanted was a model. Living close to me, in the garret of a most miserably poor
tenement house, was an old blind priest, to whom I was first attracted by
seeing him walking out, led by one of the loveliest young creatures I had ever
set eyes on. Well, this lovely young creature (a girl, of course) I saw one day
coming down the steps of a fellow-artist's studio, and on inquiry I found that
she was in the habit of going out as an artist's model, and that what she thus
earned enabled her to support her old blind uncle, the whilom priest. It was
not long before I made the acquaintance of this poor couple, and contributed
something to their humble menage by painting the old priest as 'Belisarius.'
Growing more and more fascinated with his fair niece, I proposed to put her
lovely form and face into one or more of my historical pictures, when on this
point I received a stern denial from her guardian, the old blind priest. He had
pledged his faith, he said, to four artists who desired her services, that she
should sit for them and for no one else; more than that, they should never
make any sketches of her *form*, and confine their portraitures wholly to her face

and throat.

"Now the very fact that this magnificent creature was as forbidden fruit to me, and wholly unattainable, was precisely the reason which stimulated me to the fixed purpose of procuring the sole patent right for her supreme beauty as my future model. I never thought about how the thing was to be achieved. I simply resolved IT SHOULD BE SO. It was whilst with this fixed resolve I employed myself in sketching the old priest in every conceivable historical character in which I could thrust his closed eyes and venerable white beard, that I caught the Eve and the Serpent fever, and I determined I must compete for the Lester Stanhope prize. Now, dear fellow, if you could just have read my mind some five or six years ago, and perceived the fixed and seemingly unattainable purposes that possessed me—first of securing that girl as my sole model property, and next of carrying off the Lester Stanhope prize from all competitors, I don't think you would have thought as much of my boasted standard of 'reason' as I would have wished you to do just now. However, to hasten the catastrophe of my tale, on a certain day, after two or three weeks' absence from home, I called at the poor old priest's lodging, and found he had moved away, e'en to the last lodging he would ever inhabit—to wit, the rest of a pauper's grave.

"In the little empty garret he had slept in, I found his poor forsaken niece packing up for sale their last remnants of furniture, now her only earthly possessions, by the sale of which piecemeal she had maintained herself since her uncle's sudden death. Her wan cheeks and sunken eyes rendered her unfit to pursue her ordinary occupation as a model, and—Heaven (if there is such a place) forgive me! but all at once, as it seemed to me, the dual purposes of my life then seemed to be almost flung at my very feet. The girl had no home, no money, no friends in that country, and knew nothing of her relations in England, from whom she had not heard for years. She felt an unconquerable aversion to calling upon her ordinary employers, either for the purpose of asking assistance or offering service in her present pitiable condition, and now, Dick, what think you was the result of this visit? Nay, don't fire up in eyes and cheeks as if you were a judge going to condemn me to transportation for life as the worst of felons. Sit down, old fellow, and hear me out. That evening Maddalena Morani came to my house, but she did not come until I had taken her, draped as she was in her poor peasant's attire, to the Church of the Sistines, with two of my best known friends and my housekeeper for witnesses. And then and there, by aid of another good priest I knew, a grand young fellow

with whom I have played many a game of billiards, and two of his subordinate assistants, Maddalena Morani became Maddalena Balfour, and my honourable wife."

"God bless and prosper you, good true-hearted brother of mine," cried Richard Stanhope, starting from his chair, grasping and heartily shaking his friend's hand, and then speaking with an emotion that almost choked his utterance, he queried, still holding his friend's hand, "You are happy with her? She must have made you a good wife; of that I need scarcely ask."

"Better not," replied Balfour, dryly. "However, to cut the story short, I soon succeeded in persuading Maddalena to become her husband's model for the great picture I was to compete for. She stood splendidly, looked like an angel, and I painted the thing like a Raphael, but it didn't win the prize. Of course, I knew nothing about the Bible, or Bible worthies, and so when my picture went in for competition, Sir Lester, they say, nearly swooned away at the sight of an Eve with black waving hair and large brown eyes."

"Oh, Reginald!" cried Stanhope, "how could you be such a fool?"

"Simply because there are far greater fools than I in the world, Dick," replied Balfour. "Of course, you and such as you—believers in the old-wives' fables of antiquity—set down the first woman of creation as golden-haired and blue-eyed. Well, you know the lady, and I don't. I don't question but that the same reverend gentlemen, who exhibit the holy, seamless coat that was worn by the Saviour of bad men and the destroyer of good ditto, will some fine day exhibit (*for a consideration*) the coats of skin and garments of fig leaves that 'the Lord' sewed for Adam and Eve. Until these appear, I have as much right to represent my ideas of Eve as a lovely Italian woman, with dark, waving hair and lustrous, brown eyes, as Max Muller has to suggest that the original Adam and Eve be painted with india rubber skins, black wool on their heads, and mouths considerably more prominent than their flat nasal organs. Be this as it may, I didn't know any better—thought of Mrs. Adam as of Mrs. Balfour in prospective, and married the girl I wished to paint but objected to degrade. The result—thus far, old fellow, was unfortunate—showed I was neither well informed concerning original, *at least Biblical, creative lore*, or woman's nature. My picture was rejected, and—I must say as much—every other sent in was the same. But something in my picture must have struck the rich prize-giver, for—would you believe it—he sent for me, told me I had got the wrong kind of Eve, being (I suppose) personally acquainted with the lady, and knowing her

to be a blonde, not a brunette, he complimented me on my artistic skill, and assured me that if, within three years from that time, I could find a blonde Eve, all the rest was assured, and the five thousand should be mine unconditionally."

"Now, Dick, fine and complimentary as all this seemed to be, it was just like water poured on a duck's back. My Eve fever had burnt out. Marriage cares came upon me. Time went on, and I having some talent, I suppose, and much industry, have just gone on working up daily bread and household supplies pretty successfully. I manage to win the supplies, and Madame Balfour knows how to spend them. A warm and cordial invitation from some relatives of mine at Twickenham—only a few miles from hence, you know—induced me to come to my native land on a holiday trip, a recuperative rest I much need, and now, being here, my *un*-reason of reason induces me to think there is an *under*, or it may be an *upper*, current of influence, that moves us poor mortals very much as if we were but pieces on the chessboard of some invisible but mighty and potential realm of chess-playing being. This idea—a favourite one of mine, Dick—is strengthened into certainty by the sight of *your* wonderful portraiture of my abortive subject. Dick, your Eden, the flowers, trees, landscape, serpent, and all the details of your picture, save and except the peerless Eve, is so nearly a prototype of mine, that if I could but believe in a higher directing and governing world than this, I should come to the conclusion it was occupied with us both, and—for reasons only to be outwrought in the scheme of destiny—had presented to us the same idea, to be incarnated in an art creation—mine to be coloured as the devil of beauty, yours as the angel. No comments, Dick; the thing is clear. Now for the result. Pack up that picture of yours. It is framed and ready, of course, for the Academy. Trust it to me, will you?"

"It is yours, Reginald, to do as you choose with it."

"Good! May the powers that be do so unto me, and more, also, if I do wrong to thee, my friend! To-morrow, then, I start for Rome. Arrived there, hey for Florence, and with that picture of yours for Sir Lester Stanhope's inspection, if you are not the recipient of that five thousand pounds prize within one month from this, sue me for damages, and brand me as the serpent of the legend that led on the father and mother of the race to destruction."

CHAPTER V.

TWO months had elapsed since the day when Reginald Balfour had taken leave of his friend, Richard Stanhope, carrying with him the large and splendid picture of Eve and the Serpent, to be submitted to the devotee of Catholic art, Sir Lester Stanhope, in competition for the still unclaimed five thousand pounds prize.

At the earnest request of Stanhope, Balfour had promised not to name the artist of the picture in question—in fact, both the friends had agreed that the mere mention of his hated nephew's name might prejudice the baronet against the acceptance of the picture, matchless though it was as a work of art.

No sooner had Richard Stanhope beheld his Eve removed from his studio than the real secret of his devotion to the subject of his magnificent picture awakened in his mind the determination to repeat the idolized image of the beautiful Adina, his now ceaseless dream and object of silent worship, in another picture. In response to a note addressed to her mother, Madame Baillie, that enterprising dame soon appeared in company with her lovely but singularly taciturn daughter at the artist's residence, to await his farther commands. Having resolved, as he said to himself, to devote the entire amount of his first prize money (the five hundred pounds before alluded to) in expenditure on his art—*as he phrased his passion for his fair model*—he had visited a famous masquerade warehouse, and there procured a new and exquisitely beautiful Grecian costume.

In this fascinating attire he had commanded the ever-attentive mother to enrobe her beautiful daughter, and scarcely resisting the impulse to cast himself in adoration at the feet of the fair vision, as she emerged closely guarded by the jealous mother from the dressing-room adjoining the studio, Mr. Stanhope posed the mobile model with a poignard in her hand, upturned eyes, and fixed steadfast countenance, as the beautiful and terrible wife of the Greek Agamemnon, "Clytemnestra." Remembering how exquisitely gentle and feminine his lovely model appeared in the *rôle* of Eve tempted by the Serpent, Richard Stanhope felt aghast, not to say astonished, when, after reciting to the mother and daughter the classical story of Clytemnestra, he beheld the power and apparent reality with which his listening model instantly grasped the poignard which was to stab the invisible husband to the heart, and

straightening up her fine form, and fixing her large, dark, blue eyes in a fierce immovable gaze on an imaginary victim, she at once assumed, without any direction, the *pose* which embodied to perfection the murdereress of the famed Agamemnon.

“Great Heaven! what an actress she would make,” thought the enchanted gazer.

“Will that do?” demanded the observant mother.

“Admirably, madame,” was the reply. And so, for two months after the departure of his friend Balfour, Richard Stanhope’s whole soul, his wonderful skill, his work by day and his dream by night, were all engrossed in painting his life-sized “Clytemnestra.”

Why he had chosen this weird subject he could not himself have told, but having once commenced it, with one of the most perfect models in the world standing before him, all other ideas were forgotten. To gaze upon the living impersonation of the classical angel of darkness by day; to pay her insatiate guardian every fabulous charge for time and service she chose to make, and then spend the long day till the evening curtains closed around him in touching up his wonderful work; to snatch hours of feverish, broken slumber, only to be up with the first dawn of morning; to contemplate, think over, and re-touch points in the great picture—this was Richard Stanhope’s life, and this, in fact, was the absorption of his entire being until, on a certain morning in May, a note was left at No. 9 to say that Adina, his model, was not very well, and would wish to be excused from attending the studio for the rest of the week. Overcome with chagrin at even this temporary interruption to his dreams of ecstasy, the artist read and re-read the mother’s scrawl, and only as he was about to put it aside, did he notice a second letter given to him by Mrs. Marsh, but indifferently dropped to the ground. Picking it up and tearing open the sealed package, the first thing Stanhope’s eyes rested upon was a cheque signed by Sir Lester Stanhope on one of the principal banks of London, with the charge “to pay to the bearer” five thousand pounds! The letter enclosing this most startling gift of fortune was, as Richard expected, from his friend Balfour, and after commencing with the famous Cæsarean motto—“I came, I saw, I conquered”—the writer went on to say that the baronet himself, no less than all the judges called in to adjudicate the prize, were unanimous in their award to the painter of that picture, and though there was at first some difficulty in Balfour’s determination to keep his friend’s name and personality

a secret, as he had solemnly sworn to do, he finally pledged his honour that the artist himself should appear before the judges in six months from that time, and, in giving a receipt for the cheque enclosed, he promised that he would not himself leave Rome until the artist visited it. "Now, you see how I am entangled for your sake, Dick," his friend continued; "my fair wife is a proper woman of fashion, and will insist upon going visiting here, there, and everywhere. Of course I can't go with her, and being, as I think, and everybody else says, the most beautiful woman in Italy, and, truth to own, Dick, with a pretty considerable will of her own, I don't half like my situation, and beg you will come and put a stop to it just as soon as you can."

"There's another reason why I want you to come soon, Dick—your uncle is quite an old man, some say in his dotage. Anyway, he's feeble in health, cannot last long, and from the extravagant delight with which he pores over that picture of your Adina and his Eve, I'm quite sure if you just hurry up and come here right on the top of his Eden and Eve transports, he will take you to his arms, and leave you—who knows!—all his fortune, maybe. I presume, from what you have already told me, you must be the right heir to the baronetcy, and so, if you can only get round the old gentleman during his last days, hey presto! No. 9, Stanhope Street will be exchanged for a splendid Roman palazzo. I shall still have a rich 'milor' Stanhope as my patron; my girl, Eva, a perfect five-year-old angel, Dick, and my boy Guido, a worthy three-year-old namesake of the immortal G——, will find a dear adopted uncle in my brother in spirit, whilst my wife—well, never mind, now, we will talk about her later on, when you have seen and known her. Only, dear old fellow, be advised; never marry an artist's model."

For a long time after the perusal of this letter Richard Stanhope sat in a fit of deep musing; then, as if suddenly completing some system of mental calculation with which his mind had been occupied, he arose, passed into his sleeping apartment, and exchanging his artist's rusty velvet coat for his very best attire, brushing up his handsome brown curls into an unusual form of order, and glancing furtively at the small dressing glass to see that his face was not bedaubed with the colours of his palette, he put the cheque in his pocket, descended the stairs, and advising Mrs. Marsh of the unusual fact that he was going out in the daytime, and that he should be home "by and by," he set off on a long walk into the purlieus of the Borough of Southwark. He had not proceeded far when he met with a poor flower girl, who, stretching out a

meagre hand with a bunch of violets, besought him to buy "Just one penn'orth, please, do, sir, to get me a bit of bread." Fixing at once the bunch of violets in his coat, and gathering three more such "penn'orths" from her basket, he thrust a half-crown into the hand of the amazed violet vendor, and, passing on his way with a still more satisfied smile irradiating his handsome face, arrived at length at a shabby thoroughfare of equally shabby shops and stalls; he stopped before the closed door of a house which he had carefully counted as No. 11. At this he was about to knock or ring when, looking around at the premises, he observed over the door an ill-painted dingy board on which was inscribed, "Jacopo Morani—Billiards."

"Morani!" Stanhope repeated mentally. "Yes, that is the name of her son by her first husband, I think she said; and that, then, is the teacher of billiards as I have heard. My poor Adina, you shall soon quit these foul surroundings."

As he thus soliloquised two gentlemanly looking young men came up to the door, and, addressing Stanhope, inquired—

"Is this the school of billiard playing, pray sir?"

"I don't know," replied Stanhope, retreating from them; "better inquire within."

The young men pushed open the door, which was evidently on the latch, and immediately passed up the narrow dingy stairway, closely followed by Stanhope. All three then stepped through an open door into a large back room, crowded by young but gentlemanly looking men, who were engaged watching a game being played by an elderly man in the undress uniform of a navy officer and a very young, slight boy, apparently about fifteen years of age. A tall, black-browed and very handsome Italian, who seemed to be the master of the establishment, and who was addressed by the new comers as Signor Morani, turned from the table at the head of which he had been standing, whilst the gaze of Stanhope was fixed with piercing scrutiny on the lad at the far end of the table. This boy with ruddy cheeks, exquisite large blue eyes, and beautifully marked features, presented the somewhat anomalous appearance of a lovely fair face and fine head surmounted by thick black curly hair and eyebrows so strongly marked as scarcely to look natural. Never taking his eyes off this singular looking youth, and whilst the entire room-full of strangers were applauding in low murmurs the boy's wonderful skill, suddenly those violet eyes of his, looking almost black beneath his bushy brows and the thick curls that covered his forehead, were raised from the table, met and became fixed on

the piercing glance of Stanhope.

In an instant a deadly pallor overspread the beautiful face; the boy tottered and seemed near falling, when by a strong effort, raising himself up, he muttered something about the heat of the room, and fled rather than walked behind a screen that stood in one of the room corners. The sound as of a door violently opened and shut was heard, when at the same moment Stanhope, passing unobserved through the crowd round the door, flew down the staircase, out "into the street, and striding with the step of a giant, turned the corner and into the alley way where he had at first followed his model; then arriving at the little garden gate, which was now closed and fastened within, he lightly scaled the adjoining wall, rushed up the path, and pushing open a half-closed door, entered a dark passage in which he paused for the first time in his impetuous career, calling aloud—

"Adina! Adina Baillie! Come to me instantly."

CHAPTER VI.

WE left Richard Stanhope in the dark passage of the same house in the front portion of which he had entered into the so-called billiard school of Signor Jacopo Morani. This personage, whom Madame Baillie—the mother of Stanhope's adored model, Adina—had described to Mr. Stanhope as her son by a former husband, was also said to be the brother of Richard Balfour's wife, Maddalena Morani, to whose history Stanhope had listened from the lips of his friend Balfour.

On the occasion of Stanhope's visit to the billiard room, his own purposes were scarcely defined even to himself. The sight of the brilliant young player, however, changed all his thoughts. The curly, black wig, drawn over the marked and bushy eyebrows, could not conceal from the piercing glance of love the fact that the boy who was the champion player of that hateful room, was Stanhope's Adina—his model, his dream of life, love, and hope. He must, he would rescue her. He was rich now; perhaps destined to be much richer. At any rate, fame was his. Success opened up for him the gates of inconceivable good fortune, but what would it all be without his idol?

To rescue her, if need be at once or even by force, was his first thought, and for that he was there; for that he called again and yet again—

“Adina Baillie, come here to me!”

With his second adjuration, a hand was laid upon his arm, and a trembling voice whispered—

“Oh, hush, hush! if you do not wish to ruin me.”

“I wish to ruin you, poor child!” replied Stanhope, as he caught the hands of the *girl-boy*, who now stood dimly discernible in the dark passage, trembling before him. “I have come to save, not to ruin you, Adina. I do not ask the meaning of this terrible masquerade. I see it all. Your remorseless brother, Morani, has taught and lessoned you, and your skill is his success. Nay, you must not interrupt me. I love you, Adina. I know nothing, think of nothing, and live for nothing but you. I am rich now, my child, and shall soon be richer. I am famous, and the path both to wealth and glory is open to me. But all is nothing without you. Say, love, say you will be my wife, and all I am or have shall be your own.”

"Kindly step in here, if you please, sir," said the harsh, grating voice of Madame Baillie, gently pushing open the door of a little kitchen, which, already ajar, had afforded the dame an opportunity to hear every word that had passed.

Frowning heavily, and with a silent curse on the ubiquitous horror of a woman who seemed like the evil genius of his beloved, Stanhope cried indignantly, "Must I ever be thus dogged? Can I not have at least one five minutes' conversation with the woman I wish to make my wife?"

"Not at present, my good sir," replied Madame, with cool courtesy. "Adina's brother is very jealous of her honour. Her beauty as a model, and skill as a billiard player have kept us all from starving in this great wilderness of London, and I have pledged myself to *him* never to let her out of my sight until she is better provided for."

"Well! and so she will be now, my good woman; you and your son, too, shall share my fortune, only I must—I will insist, that now, and at once, she shall give up this disgraceful life, and live as becomes the lady I propose to make my wife."

"Perhaps, sir," replied the mother, with a cold, keen sarcasm which completely abashed poor Stanhope; "perhaps the lady might not be so well disposed to be your wife as you are to be her husband."

"Good heavens, madame!" cried Richard, impulsively seizing the woman's hand, "you are right; I'm a fool—a worse—a presumptuous blockhead—and in my conceit and eagerness to save your angel daughter"—

"You have forgotten to ask her if she wants to be saved," rejoined the shrewd mother very placidly; then with a cold, treacherous smile on her repulsive face, she added—"Well, young people, I will leave you for just a few moments; but you will have to be brief, for I hear Jacopo ringing for his sister, and I must have her return to him immediately."

"Adina, speak, love. Will you be my wife?" cried Richard.

"I will, Richard," replied the girl with a strength and solemnity of manner Stanhope had never seen in her before; "but upon one condition, and one only. You must wait for me one twelve months. I am a Catholic, and have made a vow to the *Mater Dolorosa* that I will never marry until I am twenty-one. In one year I shall complete that age, and then, if you still love me, I will be your wife"—

"But I must go at once and without delay to Italy, and perhaps I may be detained there. Oh, Adina! why not accompany me as my beloved and honoured wife?"

"I have made a vow, Richard; and more—more than this; there is a prophecy connected with this vow that binds me. I cannot marry before."

"Hasten away, child," cried the mother, now bustling back to the scene of the interview. "Now, go, Mr. Stanhope—go out the back way—through this gate—no words—it must be so. I promise to bring Adina for a sitting—a 'sitting,' mind, *professionally*—to-morrow at twelve."

"To-morrow, then. You will not fail?"

"At twelve precisely. Adieu."

And at twelve precisely on the following morning the fair model and the ubiquitous mother did present themselves at the anxious artist's studio—not for a sitting, though, as the painter insisted, though he quieted the elder visitor's alarm at their sacrifice of time and trouble by putting the ordinary fee in her hands as she entered, and then, bidding them both to devote the time engaged to talking over their plans. It might have seemed strange to any disinterested observer to note the singular change which had come over each of the three personages now assembled in the artist's studio within the last few hours.

"That everlasting mother" seemed to be there only as a matter of course. Sitting at the window and apparently absorbed in watching the passers by, she could hear without seeming to take the slightest part in the interview conducted by the lovers in a not very distant part of the room.

For the first time in their brief acquaintance Adina seemed to awaken from the stony immobility of the silent model to be a pleased and charming participant in the conversation with Stanhope. He not only explained to her his position and prospects, but even read out as much of Balfour's letter as related to the picture and his own future chances of high fortune. At the close of his explanations Adina, in a sweet, and even tender manner, declared she was glad—pleased—and hoped in a few months they should all see better days than at present.

"They were very far from happy," she said, "in London. Jacopo did not like it. He had relatives in Carlisle and wished to go there, and settle as a billiard saloon-keeper."

As if quickly divining her lover's thoughts, she added—

"His relatives are not mine. They are his father's, my mother's first husband's, not my father's, and so—though we—that is mother and I—propose to go with him just to see him settled down in a home, we don't want to live with him, nor shall I ever again assume the boy for his sake, believe me."

"That is well, dearest," replied Stanhope; "but in Heaven's name, Adina, tell me how you came to *assume the boy*, and above all to be so skilful in that game you were playing."

"Oh, that is soon told, Richard," she rejoined. "Jacopo had hurt his arm and could not play. He asked me to learn. I was quick at acquiring the art, such as it is, but Jacopo, fearing lest I might be insulted as a girl player, made me"—

"Yes, yes, I see it all," cried the impetuous lover, "and I thank—nay, I will thank him personally for his care."

As Stanhope spoke, the mother rose hastily from her seat by the window—although unobserved by Stanhope, whose back was towards her. Before she could cross the floor, however, Adina said:

"Not so, Richard; not so. Do not, I beseech you, speak to or attempt to see Jacopo until you return from Italy. He has a project of his own for my disposal when I reach the marriageable age I have told you of, and without any consent on my part has, as I too well know, pledged my hand to one of his billiard saloon friends in Italy. Nay, do not look so fierce, dear. They both know of my vow, and know, too, that I cannot break it. You will return before the time is up, and then"—

"And then, my Adina, neither brother nor man of any clime or profession can claim *my* betrothed. Is it not so?" And so the time sped on. The artist, more and more enchanted with every word sounded by the sweet voice which up to that time he had scarcely heard, would have forgotten fleeting hours or mortal conditions altogether, had not a low knock at the studio door introduced Mrs. Marsh with the announcement that lunch was ready. Descending to the housekeeper's sanctum, the happy lover and his guests sat down to a splendid collation, ordered and sent in from a neighbouring hotel, and though the elderly visitor was the only one that did justice to the repast, it served to Richard at least as an excuse for prolonging the precious but farewell interview. Before they parted, Richard had arranged that all letters between the betrothed couple were to pass through Mrs. Marsh's hands at No. 9, unless ordered to the

contrary. The business-like mother affirmed that as they should be off to Carlisle in a few days, and uncertain of their address, they had better send to No. 9 to get Richard's letters, at any rate for the present. This settled, the first instalment of the famous five thousand pound prize was placed in the hands of the fair Adina, in the shape of a pile of crisp new banknotes. Then the parting words were said:

"For ever," cried Richard.

"On this earth," said the dame, in a sanctified snuffle. "Till we meet again," murmured the angelic model. Then, snatching up a guitar that stood as a "property," not unfrequently in request in the artist's studio, she sang in an exquisitely sweet voice the now antique canzonet of Haydn's "My mother bids me bind my hair." The delightful voice, exquisite grace, and tender, sympathetic intonation of the fair vocalist completed the spell of irresistible fascination which bound him to the enchantress, and it was with the sense that the whole world was left behind him with his beloved Adina that Richard Stanhope that night embarked for the Continent.

CHAPTER VII.

"FOR one twelvemonth!" murmured Richard Stanhope, as he held in his hand a letter which he had just completed and addressed to the idol of his heart. "And now only three months of that weary time has passed since I parted with her. How do I know what may befall her? She, so beautiful, so accomplished, and—oh, Heaven!—with such a mother for her one guide, and such surroundings! Fool, fool that I was, not to give up this continental business altogether, and with or without her permission to linger near her, hover around her—even unseen, unknown—until the time she has set in her religious enthusiasm, when I can claim her."

Such were the reflections of Richard Stanhope as he sat in a lonely chamber in a quiet *pension* in the Rue St. Honore, Paris, whither he had resorted, in part to meet and exchange greetings with some of his artistic friends in the city, but chiefly to while away, any where or any how, the weary time until he could again meet with and claim his beloved Adina.

"Time enough for me to go to Italy some weeks hence," he thought; "any time will do so long as I reach there before the six months is ended in which Reginald promised that I, as the painter of my picture, should appear." The fact is, Stanhope had still another motive in visiting Paris. He had heard strange rumours of a famous Parisian sort of a Cagliostro, and being somewhat interested in occultism he hoped to learn from the reputed magian the art by which he himself could behold the visionary face of his absent idol, and follow her movements *in spirit* if not in actuality. It was thus that, sitting idly speculating on the one absorbing theme of all his thoughts, a knock at the door one day some weeks after his arrival in Paris, announced a visit from an artist friend whom Stanhope had invited to spend the evening with him. M. Pierre Montvall, the visitor with whom Richard at once adjourned to a neighbouring cafe, where he had secured a private room, was even better versed than Stanhope in the mysteries of Parisian occultism, and it was with a view of learning from his friend some particulars concerning the magian whom he desired to consult, that he had invited M. Montvall to favour him with this interview.

As the two young men sat in a balcony overlooking the street, leisurely sipping their coffee and recalling the scenes and events of old student days,

Stanhope turned the conversation to the subject he so longed to inquire about, and asked Montvall if he knew and could tell him aught of one "Lassert, a personage reputed to be able to show distant places and people in a magic mirror."

"Oh, yes; I knew him well," replied Montvall. "And he has left the city, and is now in Florence."

"In Florence? Then I must leave to-morrow; that is, very soon, I mean," rejoined Stanhope, "for, truth to say, it is chiefly to consult him that I am now lingering in Paris."

"I see all about it, Dick, and sympathise with your desire," said Montvall. "Lassert is a wonder and a problem to all who know him, but he is on the wing, and it is doubtful whether or not you may find him should you go to Florence at once. Now, be composed, old fellow; don't tell me anything you want to know; yet, believe me, I can do better for you than in recommending you to Lassert. Go to the 'Sybil of the ages,' Adelaide Lenormand, she who has ruled the destinies of Europe—aye, you may stare. Dick—but I repeat, and say it deliberately, that woman, by her predictions, mark, *impressing*, as I believe, *mighty but impressible minds to fulfil those predictions through their own fixed will*, has changed the destinies of Europe, and will, I am afraid, even yet, in her old age, do more and more in the same direction; for, either she sees the inevitable, or else she creates it in the minds of those to whom she delivers her predictions. One thing is certain—those predictions never fail."

"And she lives in Paris, you say. Do you know where?"

"In Paris; and I visit her frequently."

"Then," cried Stanhope, rising and speaking impetuously, "take me to her at once, Pierre, if you love me."

"I do love you, Dick," replied his friend, gently pushing Stanhope back to his place, "but I cannot take you to the Sybil this evening. She is gone to Court, per private order. I know this, for I only left her this very afternoon."

Observing the disappointment that clouded Stanhope's face, Montvall added kindly—

"I tell you what I will do. I will call for you at noon to-morrow, and you shall fill my appointment in my place. You see, Dick, the old Seeress is still so much besieged that you may go a hundred times to her house, and unless your good genius goes before you, and impresses Mademoiselle to admit you, there is no

certainty as to when, if ever, you can see her."

"How is it, then, that you are so favoured, Pierre? You say you left her to-day to come here, and are to see her to-morrow. Are you, then, her pupil, and learning the magical art?" asked Stanhope, with a slight sneer in his tone.

"Not so," Dick, replied Montvall quietly. "I am, by her own desire, and in compliance with the wish of those whom it is not to my interest to disoblige, writing out past incidents in her wonderful career; one that, for many reasons belongs to posterity, and *should* not be lost. Would you like to hear the memoranda I have already prepared, Dick?" added the young Frenchman, drawing a small package of paper from his pocket. "Amazingly, should I," replied Stanhope, repressing at the same time, in deference to his friend, a strong tendency to laugh. Without further notice Montvall read on as follows:—

Adelaide Lenormand was a native of Alençon, in Normandy, and was born in 1722. From earliest childhood the future seemed to float before her eyes, even more vividly than the scenes of the past with which she had herself become associated. From an aged woman—one Marie Martelli, an Italian—who was her godmother, she received some instructions in laying out the cards and predicting the destiny of those who handled and cut them. She never now heeds the mere indications these cards present, she says, so long as a powerful mental impression comes to direct her in predictions of another character; in fact, she alleges that the cards are more useful in bringing her interior nature into rapport with her investigators than in declaring the events that are to happen. Sometimes, she says, these events are indicated in her investigators' hands, sometimes in the groupings of the cards, but *still* more frequently by strong and *never-failing* impressions borne in upon her mind; she cannot describe how, nor state correctly from whence. It is enough to say that when such impressions arise, the Sybil, disregarding in her own mind all other intimations, speaks of those mental impressions only, and they have hitherto *never failed*.

As the rest of Mons. Montvall's MS. appeared many years ago in the *Journal des Debats*, and has been translated endlessly into other papers, we give some extracts from an old copy of the "Overland Monthly" in preference to taking the pains of making a new translation:

Mdlle. Lenormand, who never married, nor ever became the subject of scandal or reproach, practised Astrology and Palmistry for more than sixty years, having for

patrons the celebrities of Europe, with a success unequalled since the Middle Ages. From the first she rose rapidly into note. Her study of algebra and astronomy, which she believed indispensable to her art, was incessant.

Once, indeed, she became involved in one of the countless plots for the liberation of Marie Antoinette from the Temple Prison, and was incarcerated in the Luxembourg; but she said her life was safe, and Robespierre's fall leaving her unguillotined, showed that she had read the book of fate as truly for herself as she did for others.

In the Luxembourg she met Josephine Beauharnais and predicted for her the highest destiny that the nation of France could bestow upon woman, and when, two years afterwards, the Creole widow married the young artillery officer, and told him of her gifted prison companion, and of the dazzling promises of her own horoscope, he himself consulted Lenormand, and received from her lips the augury of the career he was destined to run—his elevation to the summit of power, fall, and death in exile. Whether influenced by the thought that she who had predicted would not fail to endeavour to compass his downfall, or by other motives, from the day Napoleon I. donned the imperial purple it was said he refused to see the Norman prophetess. It was at his suggestion that interrogatories were put to her, December 11, 1809, at the Palais de Justice, when, being pressed to explain an obscure answer she had given, she replied; "My answer is a problem, the solution of which I reserve till March 31, 1814." On that day the allied armies entered Paris.

On the 28th of March, 1814, President Von Malchus, a Prussian diplomatist who played a considerable part in European affairs, was prevailed on to visit Mademoiselle Lenormand. When he arrived in Paris he heard the name of Lenormand everywhere. She had predicted to Murat that he would be a king; to a Spanish officer that one week from that day he would hear of his brother's death in Spain; to the Countess Boeholz that she would marry a prince of the blood; to Dr. Spangenberg, Queen's physician, that he would receive certain important news next day, and that two days after the messenger bringing it would be drowned; these and hundreds of other predictions proved true.

Malchus himself gives the following account of his visit to the Sybil. He says:—

"When my carriage drew up to her door I was told I could not see her then, but a fresh appointment was made which I punctually attended. Ushered in, I took my seat by the side of a little table, Mademoiselle Lenormand being *vis-à-vis*, and laid down four napoleons. She then asked me:

"1. The initial letter of my Christian name.

"2. That of my surname.

"3. Of my country.

"4. Of the place of my birth.

"5. My age, and, if possible, day, hour, and minute of my birth.

- “6. Name of my favourite flower.
- “7. Name of my favourite animal.
- “8. Name of animal of greatest repugnance to me.

“She then took fourteen packs of cards—some playing cards, others marked with necromantic figures and signs of celestial bodies—and, shuffling each pack, asked me to cut them. Offering my right hand, she prevented me, saying, ‘*La main gauche, monsieur.*’ Out of each pack I drew a number of cards, which she arranged in order. She then surveyed the palm of my left hand attentively, turned to a book of open hands, selecting one, studied the cards before her, and then began to tell me of my past, present, and future. Of the first she certainly told me much that could not be known even by my nearest friends, much that had almost passed from my own memory. Of the second, she told me with the same accuracy. Of the future, at a distance of five years from the time of the interview, I frankly state that not one of her predictions has failed.”

Talma, Madame de Staél, Mademoiselle Georges, and Horace Vernet have each at different times given accounts of interviews with Mademoiselle Lenormand, agreeing that her predictions were all verified. As she had told Napoleon of his exile, she foretold Murat the place and time of his death twenty years before it occurred. The Duchess of Courland, a lady well-known in the fashionable world of her day, whose youngest daughter married Talleyrand’s nephew, sanctions an account more remarkable than that of President Malchus.

Although Mons. Montvall continued to read all manner of the wonderful public experiences with which this renowned Sybil’s name has long been familiarly associated in her past history, our space only allows of one more extract from a MS. published in many a French paper since it was first written. Montvall read thus:—

Her oracular divinations of lucky numbers in a lottery threw other exploits into the shade. She once declared to Potier, the comic actor, that one, two, and even three prizes were assigned by destiny to every man, but that she could not tell any person’s fortunate numbers without inspecting his hands. Looking into his left hand, she said: “Mark the numbers 9, 11, 37, and 85; stake on these in the Imperial Lottery at Lyons, and you will obtain a *quarterne*.” Potier staked on the four numbers the sorceress had named. He won 250,000 francs—a sum which made a rich man of him, and when he died, in 1840, his heirs divided a million and a half.

Potier’s good luck excited the desires of Tribet, an actor of a few talents, but of many children. He flew to Lenormand; but she declined to answer. He besought her on his knees; but she remained inflexible. Mademoiselle perused his hand, but only shook her

head in silence. Tribet represented how poor he was, and urged that he was the father of ten children, whom he could not educate, and about whose future he was in despair. The Sibyl replied: "Do not desire to know your numbers; if fortunate, you will abandon your profession, become a gambler, beggar your family, and commit suicide at last." Tribet bound himself by a solemn oath never to again play. Overcome by the poor man's earnestness, Lenormand at length said: "I will tell you the numbers. More than that, I will tell you that one of them denotes the year of your death. It is 28. Another is 13, a third 66, the number of your star. There is still another number that is full of good luck for you. Choose 7 for your *quarterne*: this number will win also."

Tribet staggered from her presence like one drunk with joy. But he had not money enough to stake a large sum; and the prophetess had declared, as she did in all cases, that to stake borrowed money would not answer. The poor actor had only twenty francs. He staked the whole. Each of the four numbers came out, not one failing. Tribet, who, the day before, had not a sou, found himself the possessor of 96,000 francs. He was mad with delight; he rushed through the streets; told everyone he met that he had become a capitalist, and took a box at the theatre. What Lenormand had prophesied came to pass. Good luck crazed him. He abandoned his family, left for London, became a constant guest at the hazard table, lost, committed suicide, and his body was recovered from the Thames in the year she had predicted as that of his death.

This event was a terrible shock to Lenormand. She called herself Tribet's murdereress, execrated her art, and for more than a year after steadily refused to divine numbers for the lottery....

It was a late hour when Richard Stanhope's friend took his leave, and on parting they agreed to meet on the following day. It was exactly twelve at noon when the two friends entered the dark courtyard of the house in the Rue de Tournon, where Mademoiselle Lenormand lived. There was something mysterious in the damp walls, and the loftiness of the buildings which surrounded the court, admitting but a far distant view of the cloudy sky, which reminded one of the ancient astrologers, and of the deep, dark wells of Egypt.

The staircase which led to the apartment occupied by the Sybil was but dimly lighted, and the uneven stairs and slimy walls gave token of the contempt in which the inhabitants of the old mansion were accustomed to view the things of this lower world. Altogether there was a silence and desolation about the place which must have assisted in maintaining the feeling of awe with which in most cases the dwelling was approached.

The summons at the hollow and long-sounding bell was answered by a mysterious, dark-looking personage, who spake not a word, but ushered the

two gentlemen with noiseless steps across the vestibule, and opening an oaken panelled door, pointed them inside and then closed it, leaving them to raise the heavy green curtain drawn before it on the inside.

The saloon into which they were ushered was handsome and lofty, but of sombre and faded aspect, bearing evidences of past grandeur in its carved cornices and gilded panels.

A death-like silence pervaded the place. It was too far from the street for the sounds connected with the labours of the day to be heard within. No sound disturbed the stillness save the ticking of the old timepiece upon the chimney, that heavy, measured sound which seems to increase rather than dispel the silence. The large mirror, dim with age, and dark as ice upon the turbid pool, reflected naught but the portrait of the Sybil herself, which hung on the opposite wall. It was a large painting, representing Mademoiselle Lenormand at the flower of her age, and evidently at the time of her favour at the court of Napoleon, for she had caused herself to be represented sitting on the balcony of the palace of the Tuileries, gazing out upon the royal gardens, and leaning upon a sculptured table, whereon were spread the various insignia of her trade and calling. Among them, towering above all, the famous cup of gold given her by the Empress Josephine.

The portrait was that of a handsome woman.

Her hair, of bright auburn hue, was confined by a circle of gold, the fashion of the day, when the "classics" reigned triumphant, and the fashions of Greece were ransacked to adorn the ladies of France. The dress was of white muslin, disposed in the same classical taste. A serpent of gold encircled the arm, which was bare to the shoulder, and finely formed.

There were curious pictures on the walls—objects of *vertu*, ancient and modern, everywhere, but the weird silence broken only by the faint reverberation of very distant voices—sounds which might have been the sobs of one in anguish, or the croak of some strange bird—all the sights and sounds, in fact, dimly, faintly revealed in this strange place—whatever effect they might have had on the well-accustomed mind of his companion—produced a feeling of sadness and despondency in that of Stanhope which almost amounted to despair.

Surely that was the voice of one sobbing in deep anguish, he thought, while footsteps, muffled by the thick carpets without, seemed as if passing the door.

Then came a man's voice, in hissing accents, muttering "Be still, fool"; and then with a bitter curse on "the sorceress" the sobs and footsteps died away. The sound of carriage wheels rolling through the courtyard was heard, and then the curtain by which they had entered was drawn aside, showing the form of the silent attendant beckoning to Stanhope to follow him.

"I have sent in a card, asking Mademoiselle to give you an audience in my place," murmured Montvall, in a voice which, in spite of himself, he had lowered, as if in harmony with the strange scene around them, almost to a whisper.

Without another word Stanhope followed his silent conductor, and after crossing a large dimly-lighted vestibule, and a no less obscure ante-room, the attendant raised a thick, heavy curtain, and motioning to Stanhope to pass beneath it, he found himself in the presence of the famous Sybil.

Although it was only a little past noon, the high-studded, dark-painted chamber, in which the sorceress held court, and the deep set windows, shaded by thick, heavy curtains, would have rendered the sombre apartment dark as night, had not the table to which Stanhope advanced been lighted by four large wax candles, two of which were burning on either side of a cabalistic chart behind the Sybil's chair, whilst two others were in stands on either side of the table. The two lights behind were shaded by green hoods, which threw a strange, almost ghastly lustre on the face of the prophetess, as she sat in a high-backed, leather chair, tall, straight, narrow, and so full of brass nails as almost to resemble an upright coffin. The other lights on either side of the table were unmistakably designed to shed their full radiance on the visitor, placed in a chair between them. This circumstance and the sombre hue of her attire certainly contributed to throw a degree of mystery over the Sybil, and it was some time before the eye, getting accustomed to the dim atmosphere, could succeed in tracing her outline with distinctness.

Stanhope was surprised to find in the powerful and dreaded adept a person of short stature and of immense bulk, doubtless the consequence of her sedentary life; and yet, in spite of this, at the very first glance it was easy to perceive that she was a person of no ordinary mental power and discernment. Her hair was of snowy whiteness, and fell in masses of curls upon the rich silk and lace she wore. She spoke in tones remarkably sweet and clear, without any of the piping or quavering of old age, and her eyes, black and piercing, seemed to retain all the brilliancy of their youth. Fixing her steadfast glance on

Stanhope with a quest more piercing than any he had ever before encountered, she said, in a low and almost stern tone: "Why do you come to me when the fates speak so clearly to yourself?"

"Not so, Mademoiselle," replied her visitor, strangely awed by her manner; "I seek your interpretation of what—of what—I—do—not—know."

"I will not, cannot tell you," she cried, rising from her chair as she spoke, and pointing to a screen which shaded a door at the farther end of the long, narrow apartment. "Better for you, sir, at once to depart."

"At least, Mademoiselle, look at my hand," cried Stanhope imploringly, and holding out, as he had been instructed, his left hand.

Seizing this extended hand, and gazing into it as if from compulsion, the face of the prophetess, already sickly hued by the shade of the green hoods of the lights behind her, became positively livid ere her long, searching inspection was over. Once more she cried, "Go!" and throwing the cold hand from her, she murmured, "I WILL TELL NO MORE."

"You will not even give me a number, then?"

"Yes; three. THREE LIVES, mind! One ended in twelve months; the other in twenty years. After that, all is blank to me. I can see no more. Go! *Le jeu est fini.*"

Covering her face with her white hands, as if to shut out something she could not bear to look upon, she only responded to Stanhope's urgent petitions that she would still further consult her oracle, by deep sighs, and a passionate motion of one hand towards the screen.

Stanhope, at length finding no hope of moving the Sybil from her dumb dismissal, walked towards the screen, behind which a door opened outwards. This he passed through. The attendant in waiting closed the door behind him, and he descended the stairs to find his friend waiting for him in the courtyard below.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was late in the night of the same day on which Richard Stanhope had paid his very unsatisfactory visit to Mademoiselle Lenormand, that he was awakened from his usually profound sleep by a strange feeling of oppression as if some unaccountable weight was fastening him down in his bed. Starting up hastily and changing his position, in the belief that he had been suffering from the curious influence called *nightmare*, he endeavoured once more to compose himself to rest—in this attempt, however, he was entirely unsuccessful. The physical sense of weight was gone, but now that he was fully awake he experienced a feeling of uneasiness equally distressing and unaccountable. So marked became the sensation of some unusual presence near him—some actual individuality of an unwelcome and malignant nature—in his room, that springing from his bed, and hastily drawing up the blinds, he examined every portion of his apartment by the light of the street lamps which shone so clearly into every nook and corner, that he had to return to his couch baffled, and utterly at a loss to account for the sensations that had awakened, and subsequently so painfully affected him. But this was not all—night after night the same sense of an unendurable though unaccountable influence seemed to fill his chamber with a real though invisible presence, as of a hidden foe—tangible to the mind, but not to the physical senses. “I will quit this place,” was Stanhope’s mental resolve after nearly a week’s suffering, and that too of a character for which there seemed no other possibility of accounting, than was to be found either in the old superstitious idea of a haunted spot, or some mental disorganization of the *percipient* himself. The latter idea, and, of course, the most painful of the two alternatives took possession of Richard Stanhope’s mind, when he found that a change of place produced no modification of the terrible unrest that now began to press in upon his midnight hours, depriving him of sleep, and filling his mind, waking or sleeping, with a sense of horror, which made him *afraid of himself*—afraid to be alone, and doubtful whether the source of his misery was not the approaching wreck of his own mental balance.

Paris and its environs at that time presented many attractions to Stanhope’s artistic tastes. The grand old palaces of the Louvre, Versailles, and many another scene memorable alike in the annals of art and history, attracted the

classical scholar and lover of the beautiful with so much interest that he had lingered in the French capital far beyond the time he had intended to spend there, when he first commenced his continental tour. It was now almost five months since he had parted from Reginald Balfour, and the six months to which he had condemned that warm hearted friend to remain at his house at Rome, until he (Stanhope) should be able to present himself as the artist of the famous picture to Sir Lester Stanhope, would soon expire. What fatal spell was it, then, that seemed to chain him to Paris, to endure restless nights, weary days, and aimless wanderings from place to place? With a view of beguiling his singular and most unhappy frame of mind, Richard Stanhope, on one occasion, accompanied his friend Montvall, and two or three of his fellow artists, to a *séance* given by the then famous magnetist, Monsieur D'Eslon, one of the early followers and successors in Paris of Anton Mesmer. Amongst the experiments performed on this occasion with the "*lucides*" of the great magnetizer were some passages of mental impression (at that time known as *electro-biology*), in which the operator caused one of his subjects—a young lady selected haphazard from the strangers there assembled—to see, hear, taste, and smell precisely as the operator willed her to do, and that merely by what is now called "hypnotic suggestion." It was at the point, however, when D'Eslon bid her beware of an imaginary assassin, who was intending to shoot her, and the poor young girl exhibited a sense of terror equally frightful and pitiful to witness, that Richard Stanhope became most powerfully interested.

In the agonizing fear of an unknown and invisible foe, as exhibited by the poor "*lucide*," Stanhope at once realized his own nightly sufferings, and mentally determined that he himself was also the subject of some malign mesmeric influence, only that the operator, instead of being a human being was a *Spiritual* one, and instead of substituting, as D'Eslon had done, a pleasing for a frightful influence, for purposes unknown to the witness Stanhope's tormentor continued his *magnetic* exercises in the direction of pain and unrest.

"Why," argued he, to himself, "should not some unknown enemy exert over me the same power that D'Eslon exercised over that girl? Spirit or mortal, it is all the same. The magnetizer of earth is the magnetizer of the life beyond, and some such influence it is that has been the haunter of my midnight hours. One thing at least, then, I have learned by this exhibition, and that is the *nature* of the influence that has been inflicted upon me, what or whoever it has proceeded from; and now all that remains for me to do is to break the spell,

and the best means I can devise is to quit Paris at once, and pass on my way to join Balfour at Rome." Full of this idea Stanhope quitted the *séance* with the determination to resist with all the power of his being the evil and malignant influence, be it what it may, which he now felt confident had been exerted upon him for causes unknown. As he was returning to his lodgings he was overtaken by a sudden shower of rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning. On entering the gardens of the Palais Royal he encountered a large assemblage of persons, who, like himself, had been startled by the storm. Pushing his way amidst the crowd who were seeking shelter, Stanhope suddenly came upon a woman who stopped his path by her embarrassment in attempting to open her umbrella. He was about to offer to assist her, when the light of the street lamp, beneath which she stopped, fell full on her face. What he then saw so amazed, and even appalled him, that he lost the power of speech, and the woman had succeeded in her effort and passed rapidly on her way before he had sufficiently recovered his presence of mind to detain and accost her. Evidently she had not noticed him, and it was some minutes before he could actually determine that the stranger who was now lost to sight was Madame Baillie, the mother of his adored betrothed. To speculate upon what possible causes could have brought that woman there, and then to reproach himself bitterly for the fatuity which seemed to have paralyzed him, and held him bound to the spot, instead of rushing after her to enquire into the occasion of her presence, were his first reflections. Then followed a wave, as it were, of mental impressions, sweeping across his mind, and filling it with the same hateful and oppressive sensations of mingled horror and apprehension that had of late so constantly disturbed his night's repose. What was that woman doing there? Why did this rush of midnight horror sweep over his soul at the very moment when she passed near him? And, by what possibility could this woman (ever to him the veritable serpent of his Edenic picture, and the incarnation of the tempter of his Eve) recall, as it did thus vividly, the shadow of evil that hovered around his unresting hours of midnight? That very morning Stanhope had received by post one of the rare and very brief answers to the long and frequent letters that he addressed to his betrothed.

She always excused herself for writing so seldom and so briefly on the ground that she was studying hard to perfect herself in such branches of education as would fit her to be her *Richard's wife*, and, therefore, though she would not break her promise of writing the first of each month, she could only write enough to say 'ALL'S WELL.' She casually added that her mother was well,

and had been on a visit to a relative near the Carlisle school in which Adina herself was residing. "And yet I see her in Paris," murmured Stanhope, as he sat that night in his chamber reading, again and yet again, the little billet that he had that morning taken from the hands of the postman, with the same veneration as the devout Catholic would have touched a saintly relic. "What can this mean? Who knows?" he added aloud; "perhaps what I saw to-night might have been that creature's wraith!... Great heavens! Who spoke?" he cried, starting to his feet, as a low soughing sound, something between a sob and a deep prolonged sigh, swept through the outer hall, and seemed to penetrate even, with a chilling air tangible to the touch, into the room, and with it came the distinct utterance of the words, "No! no! no!" "Who speaks?" again he cried; and now—surely some doors must be open, for the wind sweeps past the candle; the flame is bent—flickers—goes out; Stanhope, appalled but gaining strength with every fresh move of the crisis, gropes his way hastily to the recess where he keeps his tinder-box. He feels his way with his hands,—but, ere he reaches the spot he seeks, a lurid light presents itself before him. It is not the lightning—for the quick flashes of the heavenly fires shoot through the window behind him—and this is a steady, misty, thick glare, in the midst of which appears the head, shoulders, and chest of a very old man. It is but a dim outline, thick, lurid, and misty as the awful light in which it is seen; it resembles an ill-lighted panorama. The old head is covered with dishevelled grey hair; the eyes are starting from the wrinkled old face; a ghastly wound on the throat is seen, which nearly severs the head from the body, and from the bleeding neck dangles a rosary of beads and a huge crucifix—a black figure on a golden cross. The apparition wears a white night-dress, open at the chest, on which is laid a hand bereft of the two forefingers.

Even in the unspeakable horror of this vision there is a dim sense on the part of the beholder that the marred half-fingerless hand is laid on the blood-stained breast for purposes of identification. It must be so, as the instant the glance of the appalled seer rests upon the hand the vision fades out slowly, but vanishes with the deliberation of a passing show, and, except for the occasional flashes of the lightning, as the distant thunder bespeaks the passing away of the storm, the room is again enveloped in thick darkness. The bench on which the visionary and horrible show seemed to have been placed is reached, the tinder-box is grasped, a light struck, and all the available candles in the chamber are set burning—then the lonely watcher sits down to reflect.

The apparition was that of a stranger, yet it seemed to Stanhope as if in a dream of the past, he could recall something or some one not altogether unfamiliar to him; still, think as he would, and go over in memory every creature he had ever known—at least that he could recollect—none corresponded with the awful presentment of that visionary face and form. Without attempting to undress, and after many long hours of unquiet watching and reflection, the weary artist threw himself upon his bed in the effort to snatch a brief season of repose.

From time to time he slept, but his feverish and broken dreams were full of pictures as terrible as the vision of his waking hours. At one moment his troubled spirit would behold the Paradisaical garden of his prize picture, but ever and anon the peerless Eve would expand into the terrible Greek heroine of the Agamemnon murder, "Clytemnestra." The Satanic-faced Serpent would merge into the hated lineaments of the woman he so dreaded and feared—the mother of his angel.... The morning came at length. With its first dawning the harassed sleeper awoke aroused, and hastened to answer the knock of the *concierge* at his door. "A letter for Monsieur Stanhope," the man said; "and one," he added, "which had been delivered by the postman the previous day, but monsieur having been absent till late at night, there had been no chance to give it him till now."

Before the man had given half his message Stanhope had hastily torn open the letter. The postmark was from Florence, and the direction was in Balfour's handwriting. The letter contained only these words (written evidently in haste, and with a trembling hand): "For heaven's sake come on immediately, lose no time; you are wanted.—Ever yours, Balfour."

"Come on where?" murmured Stanhope, with the accustomed habit of a lonely man, thinking aloud—"He lives at Rome, but the postmark is from Florence—no date, no place is named. Well! I will e'en go on to Rome first, and then—Who speaks?" Once more the sobbing, sighing sough of a cold wind sweeps through the chamber, and once more the strange breeze seems to syllable forth the utterance of the past night—"No! no! no!" But Richard Stanhope, disregarding the ghostly monition, one hour later was speeding on his way to his friend's house at Rome.

CHAPTER IX.

ALTHOUGH the transcriber of these memoirs is not prepared to state the exact period of their occurrence, there is good reason to believe that it was before the era of quick steam travel.

Richard Stanhope's attempt, therefore, to obey his friend's request to "Come at once," as recorded in our last chapter, was only expedited through the agency of post horses wherever they could be procured, and lagging " diligences" whenever they could be bribed to fulfil their inappropriate names.

Rome reached at length, after a long and weary pilgrimage, compared with which the modern steam engine is a lightning magician, Richard Stanhope found himself standing before the open gates of his friend Balfour's hired "Palazzo." It must once have been a splendid, though somewhat isolated, dwelling, near the *Corso*—a princely residence evidently, as the grand entrance court, vast hall, wide marble stairway, gilded ceilings, and enamelled or richly-painted walls proved. But now there was a change, and such a one as either spoke in mute but eloquent tones of fallen fortunes, or utter indifference and neglect.

Something of both pressed upon the sensitive nature of Richard Stanhope as he ascended the once magnificent staircase of the "Balfour Palazzo" to visit Madame, who was "at home" that day, as a lounging lacquey informed him, though the Signor, for whom he first inquired, was absent.

Ushered at length into the spacious reception room, he found himself in presence of a very beautiful but gaudily attired woman, who was surrounded by a number of visitors, all of the male sex, whose dress and features evidently represented fluttering Cavaliers of different nationalities. Suffering his keen glance to wander from one to another of the different notabilities that thronged that *Salon*, the eyes of the visitor fastened upon one special form, though that was not the fair creature who was the centre of attraction to the admiring circle around her.

The person with whom Stanhope at first exchanged formal greetings, and by whom he was introduced to the lady of the mansion, was an English nobleman whose portrait Stanhope had been engaged to paint for an art exhibition, and whose name and fame had become notorious throughout European

fashionable society for the multitude of conquests he had achieved over many trusting women, the homes he had blighted, and the hearts he had broken.

By way of doing *justice* to this once *celebrated* personage we may recall the report that he had fought so many duels with outraged husbands, fathers, and brothers, whose fairest and best beloved home treasures he had lured away, that on one such occasion, when the wife of an eminent peer had consented to share his infamy, he redeemed *the honour of his class* by offering to cross over to Calais to fight a duel and give *the injured husband that satisfaction* on French ground that he had again and again been bound over by the laws of Great Britain not to attempt within its limits. The sequel to this story was that the *injured husband* thus addressed wrote back to say that the titled seducer had already given the said husband the utmost satisfaction he was capable of by releasing him from, and carrying off a bad woman.*

And this was the man (all too well known to Richard Stanhope) that he now saw lounging on the arm of the beautiful Italian lady's chair, and toying in idle playfulness with the two innocent little children who called Reginald Balfour father! It was some two hours before Stanhope could procure the private interview he sought, and was determined to have, with his friend's wife.

Even then he only obtained the privilege he desired by sending up to the *throne* of the fair sovereign of the household an urgent note, with the request for the favour of a private interview, a point he enforced by a silent exercise of that **WILL POWER**, the effect of which he had so recently observed in the action of M. D'Eslon.

Late in the evening of the day on which he reached Rome, Richard Stanhope was admitted to the boudoir of the fair wife of the one who to him was the dearest friend he had on earth. His interest in the approaching inter-

* As this incident, like all the main features of the story now being given, is STRICTLY TRUE, it seems in order to notice the "*laws of honour*" which prevailed in Europe during the past hundred years. It was perfectly honourable for a *gentleman* to enter another man's house or family, and seduce by arts needless to describe, that other man's wife, daughter, or sister, and having won and carried off his victim, the *laws of honour* required that he should offer the injured husband, father, or brother, as the case might be, *satisfaction* by meeting him in open combat with such weapons as would ensure the fact that one or other of the belligerents should be *killed* or otherwise seriously wounded. When this result was obtained the *honour* of the entire transaction was redeemed, and all parties were *honourably* satisfied. Great is the honour of *civilized* seduction and murder!!—ED. U.U.

view was certainly not much enhanced by the fact that on reaching the splendid corridor from which the various chambers branched off, he saw the same English nobleman (referred to above) come carelessly, and seemingly ostentatiously rather than otherwise, out of the very private boudoir into which he was subsequently ushered, and descend a narrow flight of steps opposite to the grand staircase by which he himself had ascended.

Heart-sick and sorrowful as the inspiration of the place rendered him, Richard Stanhope's interview with his friend's wife was not in any way calculated to restore his feelings to a sense of pleasure, or even hope for that friend's future happiness. Madame Balfour appeared to him, externally, the most beautiful being he had ever looked upon, though she was as cold and statuesque as if she were posed as a model before a sternly exacting artist. She did not know, she said, where her husband was, or why he had sent for his friend. He never told her where he was going, she added, carelessly, or when he should return.

It was evident to the pained observer that little or no sympathy existed between the husband and wife, although it was equally apparent that both parties were passionately fond of their two sweet little children, a girl of six years old and a boy of four.

With some hesitancy, and not a little anxiety, Stanhope informed the lady that he was well acquainted with her sister Adina, and her mother, Madame Baillie. Would she not wish to inquire for them? Drawing herself up with the hauteur of an offended princess, the fair dame replied: "Oh, Signor, I beg you to understand they are no relations of mine. Adina is simply my foster sister, and Madame Baillie was the nurse of my widowed mother. I can scarcely remember my mother," she added, "and of my father I have no recollection whatever; but when my poor mother died this nurse Baillie, a Frenchwoman, took me and my little brother Jacopo."

"Jacopo Morani, Madame."

"Even so, Signor. Morani was mine and my brother's name. I presume we were left by our parents without a provision, so when this nurse Baillie adopted us she made us earn our own living by hiring us out to artists as little children models. At length my uncle, who was a priest, found us out, and objecting, I believe, to his sister's children being engaged in the model business, he offered to adopt us both. Me he insisted on taking, and I lived with him until his death. My brother Jacopo, whom he wished to become a priest, refused to

accede to his wishes, and remained with our reputed foster mother. She and my little brother subsequently left Italy and went to France with her infant daughter, Adina, and of none or either of these parties have I ever heard since."

To say that Stanhope was thunderstruck as he listened to this recital would but poorly describe the dismay as well as amazement with which it filled him. Strange to say, however, the revelation, instead of suggesting the least tendency to prejudice his beloved Adina in his eyes, only the more strenuously determined him to lose as little time as possible in removing her from the society of her treacherous mother and the so-called brother Jacopo, who, as he supposed, had taken advantage of her pretended relationship to force her into the hateful disguise of a billiard-playing boy. It was then with ill-concealed haste to quit the presence of the haughty lady of the mansion that Richard, after bestowing a few caresses on the lovely children of his friend, made his parting obeisances, and that very same night set out on his journey to Florence.

One of the most enchanting air castles that had ever been created in the dreams of a worshipper of the beautiful was Richard Stanhope's vision of wandering through and around the city palaces of Florence. Sometimes in lonely murmurings to himself; sometimes in conversation with his artistic associates, he would descant on the delight he should experience when he should realise his boyhood's most cherished dream by visits to Rome and Florence. He should tread the streets pressed by the feet of Bruno, Dante, Galileo, Luther, Savonarola, and Michael Angelo. He should linger around the ruined splendours of the Medecis, and the very stones that had echoed to the tread of saints, martyrs, princes, potentates, sculptors, and artists would prate still of their whereabouts, and inspire their humble worshipper with some gleams at least of the Divine fire that had animated them. And now—oh pitiful failure! stern awakening from all the illusions of his long-cherished imaginations!

His visit to Rome, the grand ideal of his soul's aspirations, he had only been able to extend through a few short hours, and these, unlighted by one gleam of pleasant remembrance, while his journey to Florence only served to revive all the strange torture and unaccountable impressions of the same malignant spell cast upon him which made his nights at Paris unendurable. Recollecting, too, such a vivid presentment of the terrible apparition he had there witnessed, he could scarcely believe he was not in direct presence of the murdered man

whose visionary face and form seemed continually to rise up before him. The weary journey at length ended, the first question arising in Stanhope's mind was, where should he be likely to find his friend Balfour?

In his startling demand for Stanhope's immediate presence at Florence no address was given, neither had he the slightest idea whether or no he should enquire for him at his uncle's residence at Bello Sguardo. Considering the latter proposition the most probable, and reflecting that sooner or later the unknown artist of Sir Lester's prize picture must be presented to him in person, he determined to avail himself of the present occasion to make his own introduction. Great was his astonishment, however, when, on enquiring at the coach office where he had landed for "the Villa Medicis," the residence of Sir Lester Stanhope, the official to whom he spoke replied in tones of deep sympathy—"Alas, Signor, for the poor old Milar Stanhope! But, Signor, you are too late, so avoid the great assemblage of people expected to attend the *funeral*. It took place early this morning; quite three hours ago."

"A funeral! My uncle dead!" cried Stanhope in a voice of horror. "When? How? Speak, some of you? What does all this mean?"

"Murdered, Signor," replied the official addressed, "cruelly, foully murdered five nights ago! None can find out who did the deed. The poor old Chevalier's head was nearly severed from his body, and he was found in the morning dead—dead! and none to tell the dreadful tale of who committed the terrible crime."

"Would you like to see the account of the inquest, Signor?" asked one of the bystanders, several of whom had now gathered around the pale, agitated young Englishman.

"Yes, yes! I thank you, Signor," responded Stanhope, taking the newspaper courteously tendered to him. "My poor old uncle! and I lingering idly away in Paris! A carriage, quick! quick! Horses and a postilion! Make no delay. Thanks, all of you. To the Villa Medicis, Bello Sguardo."

CHAPTER X.

THE tidings being circulated at the coach office where Richard Stanhope had landed were all too true. In the Florence journal placed in his hands before commencing his journey to his late uncle's residence, he read how the unfortunate old gentleman had been murdered by an assassin, of whom no trace could be found. How, at the succeeding inquest, it was shown that in the room where the deceased had been found, amongst other papers on the writing table was a letter from Balfour, announcing to Sir Lester that his nephew, Richard Stanhope, was the artist of his famous prize picture of "Eve and the Serpent." Beside this letter was an open paper, *marked copy*—and purporting to be an answer from Sir Lester to Signor Balfour expressive of pleasure at the discovery of the artist in his own nephew, and requesting that Balfour would at once make a journey to Florence to talk over the subject of the great picture with him. Most fortunately for Balfour, the date of this copy was on the very day of the assassination; and as the letter despatched by the poor old Baronet could not have reached Rome till after the fatal event, no possibility of any suspicion could have attached to Balfour, *who did not even arrive in Florence until after Sir Lester's death*. By a careful search into the unfortunate victim's effects a will was discovered, quite recently executed, in which—after expressing contrition for the long-continued alienation which had subsisted between him and his brother (Richard Stanhope's father)—he bequeathed to his nephew (now the Baronet, his heir, and only living relative) all his property, effects, and estates, together with all that he possessed, in compensation for the aforesaid alienation which had existed between the two brothers.

It was with sentiments of the deepest sorrow and sympathy that Richard Stanhope read of his uncle's unhappy fate, late remorse, and provident care for his forsaken nephew; and, as he wandered through the now deserted villa, with its stately halls, empty chambers, and magnificent galleries, it was some time ere he could gain composure enough to give orders for a fine monument to be erected to the memory of his beloved father's only brother. It was not long after he had entered upon possession of his newly-acquired splendid legacy that he was joined by his friend, Reginald Balfour, who—at Stanhope's earnest request—consented to be his guest at his splendid villa, until the

necessary legal formalities attendant on the bequest had been complied with.

There were lawyers to be consulted—both at home and abroad—all manner of official observances to be gone through—above all (to Sir Richard himself) there were long letters to be written to his affianced bride informing her of the wonderful change in his fortunes, and instructions to be sent to Mrs. Marsh at No. 9, Stanhope Street, London, to engage servants, tradesmen, and workmen to fit up said No. 9 in splendid style for the wedding which was to take place there exactly six months hence.

"I will return to England as soon as the wearisome settlement of present affairs permits me," thought Stanhope. "I will watch over, protect, and rescue that angel of mine—surrounded, as I can plainly discern, by liars, speculators, and traders on her goodness and beauty. Yes, I will go at the first possible moment I can be spared from the business demands now upon me."

Reginald Balfour only remained his friend's guest for a few days, urging as his excuse for a rapid departure, not his anxiety to return to his beautiful wife and her large circle of admirers, but the many demands that must be awaiting him for his professional services. Before taking leave of his friend, however, Balfour called Stanhope's attention to a full length portrait of his late uncle hanging in one of the galleries of the villa in which—to Stanhope's amazement and horror, he recognised *a perfect fac simile of the Paris vision that had appeared to him—the face of the grey-headed victim*, and even *the loss of the two forefingers of the one hand*, a circumstance which Balfour explained by stating that Sir Lester accidentally suffered this mutilation when viewing a piece of swiftly revolving machinery, on which he had foolishly placed his hand. Although Richard Stanhope's kindly nature was deeply moved by his old uncle's late remorse and noble act of *post mortem* compensation to himself, his heart was full of glad anticipation of the effect which his improved fortunes must have upon his adored betrothed, and his brain whirled with the idea of his many projects to adorn and beautify his fine old London home for the reception of his fair bride.

"... Sorrowful as I am for my poor old uncle and his terrible fate," wrote Sir Richard to the latest address given him at Carlisle by his betrothed, "I cannot but feel I am the happiest and most fortunate of men. Not a cloud darkens the horizon of my future, on which love, friendship, happiness, wealth, and splendour shine forth as the five-pointed star of a destiny, the glorious promises of which far, far, transcend all that I had ever dared to hope for or

speculate upon."

Stanhope had scarcely despatched this glowing missive to England when one of the servants of his new household brought him a letter with the post mark of Rome, and in the handwriting of his beloved friend, Balfour. In a wild rhapsody, breathing nothing but anguish and despair, Sir Richard read the following terrible lines:—"This night is the last I shall ever spend on earth.... The pistol lies charged before me which shall end my miserable career, and send me hence—whether to sleep the sleep that knows no waking, or to pass into a land of fresh trial and retribution, I know not—I care not. It is enough that on earth—in loneliness, desolation, and sorrow—I will stay no longer." The suicide's wretched and despairing letter went on to inform Sir Richard that Madeline Balfour (his wife) had eloped during his absence with an English *roué*,—the nobleman whom Stanhope had noticed as so familiar with her on the occasion of his own brief visit to his friend's house at Rome.

The writer added that the bitterest wrong the faithless wife had inflicted on her unhappy husband was the fact that she had carried off the two precious children—the idols of his heart—in her shameful elopement, and that as the fugitives had been traced as having left Naples in the seducer's yacht, all chance of further discovery or means of arresting their flight, so as to restore his angel children, was lost to the wretched, miserable father. Whatever blame Sir Richard may have been disposed to attach to the careless and all too dissipated husband, nothing but deep grief remained in his heart, when he found by personal inquiry that the flight of Madame Balfour, the abstraction of the two children, and the suicide of the unhappy husband were all realised and irretrievable events.

"Alas! Alas!" murmured Stanhope to himself, in summing up the tragic tidings, "my FIVE-POINTED star of hope is already shorn of one of its brightest beams—that of FRIENDSHIP—but in the four that remain, thou, my Adina, together with the rank, wealth, and prosperity that I shall be happy enough to bestow upon thee, will compensate me for all I have lost." ... "Good heavens! how the lightning flashes and the thunder rolls! What storms these Italian climes are subject to! Or, is it the voice of fate which seems almost to syllable in my ears—those fatal words, *never more?*"...

Let the reader consider that five years have passed away since the events noted in the above sections of our narrative transpired. Once more we return to the locality at which our history first commenced, namely No. 9, Stanhope Street, London.

Let us take the privilege of a historian by describing a scene which our own eyes have not witnessed, but one which has been sufficiently well testified of by others to justify our reproducing it as a faithful record of history.

The entrance hall of No. 9 had been enlarged by throwing into it two or three rooms on the one side, whilst the parlours on the opposite side had been merged into one long, spacious, and splendidly furnished dining-room. The hall was paved with slabs of black and white marble. Statues holding gilded candelabras were ranged along the walls, intersected with large tubs of the finest possible flowering shrubs. The noble dining-room, besides all the appurtenances of rich hangings, exquisite marbles, girandoles, and other luxurious adornments, held in its centre a long dining-table covered with a fine damask cloth, embroidered serviettes, beautiful china plates, dishes, and glasses, china baskets heaped up with the rarest cakes, fruits, pasties, and breadstuffs, cut glass decanters full of sparkling wines—in a word, the centre table and sideboard displayed all the accessories of the richest and most luxuriously prepared banquet, and the numerous chairs grouped around the table, all composed of velvet and gilding, and all in keeping with the rest of the splendid furniture bespoke the expectancy of a large and fashionable gathering.

Passing out of this apartment, and up the old-fashioned but richly carpeted stairway, with its carved balustrades, statues in every niche, and gilded cornices, we enter a suite of drawing-rooms and a library furnished in the highest style of taste and splendour; and ascending a second flight of stairs enter at once a bedroom, the white satin hangings and entire furnishings of which bespeak a bridal chamber of the rarest, fairest beauty—a palatial room which a princess might be proud to call her own on her bridal night. Adjoining this is an exquisite boudoir, all the fittings and adornments of which were of the same pearly hue and richness as those of the bridal chamber.

There were several other smaller rooms in this mansion, furnished in an equally luxurious and costly style. The only exception to this display of wealth and splendour was the top floor, which, for the present, we are forbidden to enter,—and the kitchen offices, of which we shall presently speak, but that

which may be seen and described,—though never perhaps in its complete and terrible reality—is the awful desolation that pervaded the entire scene—the accumulation of dust and network of cobwebs that covered and festooned every article of furniture, walls, ceilings, and curtains;—the decay of every shrivelled plant, the dead leaves of the long-perished blossoms, the worms that crept over and about the dead fruits,—death, dirt, and desolation everywhere.

The tapestries were faded, the rich curtains gnawed and soiled by rats and mice; even the white, or rather yellow, faded satins of boudoir, dressing-room, and bridal chambers, all—all—like the pictures and books, were thick with the dust which spoke of the utter neglect and waste of years—their very number unrecorded save in mould, rust, dust, and emblems of death and ruin. One little room, parted off like the rest of the kitchen offices from the entrance hall, seemed alone to be the scene of human habitation and household supervision. This nest of a place was plainly furnished, and the few books and needlework scattered around bespoke the presence of some feminine occupant; at the same time, the neatness and order that pervaded the place would have suggested its dislocation from any other portion of the weird and silent spot, still known as No. 9, Stanhope Street, had not that little room still sheltered the once well-remembered form of the poor old housekeeper, Mrs. Marsh.

Yes; there she sits, her grey hair drawn back neatly over her forehead, her tidy white cap, apron, and rusty black dress the same as ever, but the sad, thin pinched face, the leaden eyes dim with weeping, and the thin, trembling, faded hands, all tell of their connection with a place too sad, too woful, to be called a human habitation.

And yet *it is still inhabited*, and that by some other one than Mrs. Marsh, for even as she sits there with folded hands, fixed eyes, and a countenance on every line of which despair is written, there is a slow and measured step heard crossing the marble hall, as if making for the outer door. Glancing up at the clock, just on the stroke of eight, on an autumn evening already deepening into sombre twilight, she starts as if recognizing the step, and the fitting hour when she was to hear it. Timidly opening the door leading from her room into the hall, she softly murmurs, “Anything I can do for you, master?”

No response came except the waving of a thin, soiled hand, warning her back. She retreats, but not till her tear-dimmed eyes had taken in, in its full proportions, the figure of a tall, thin, bent man's form, clad in a loose coat, hanging in folds around his gaunt body, with a face begrimed and foul as if

with the accumulated dirt of long years.

Large, heavy, yet restless dark eyes, a shock of long and unkempt hair which would have been white but for the grime of dust and dirt that turned the tangled curls into an iron grey; these, with the addition of worn-out shoes and a large, dark, flap hat falling over a face of woe and despair, completed the aspect of the artist who was once known as the beau ideal of grace and manly beauty—Sir Richard Stanhope, Baronet. With a large empty basket hanging on his arm, the woeful-looking apparition whom Mrs. Marsh still watches through the half-closed door, with streaming eyes, slowly draws back the bolts of the hall door, opens it, and closes it behind him. As he descends the steps and emerges into the street a young lady passing by, and leaning on the arm of her lover, seeing the woeful apparition in the dim obscurity of the night, draws back, as if in terror, and whispers to her companion, “Don’t pass him; they say its unlucky to meet him. That’s the creature that they call in this neighbourhood ‘Dirty Dick!’”

CHAPTER XI.

OUR narrative must now go back for some five years, and returning to No. 9, Stanhope Street, present us with a picture of Mrs. Marsh, as she stands in the midst of a crowd of lacqueys, housemaids, and other domestics, on the morning when Sir Richard Stanhope was expected to arrive immediately after his long-projected marriage, the approach of which he had already announced to his faithful housekeeper.

For several weeks after the reception of Sir Richard's last letter dated from Florence and detailing the various preparations he desired to be made in his London home, Mrs. Marsh had been incessantly engaged in superintending workmen in the changes required by the master of the house—refurnishing the various rooms, hiring servants, and preparing for the splendid wedding banquet which he had ordered to be got ready for the special day indicated. Even the hour at which the bride and bridegroom were to arrive and the number of guests to be present at the banquet were carefully noted. Sir Richard added that he himself should send out from Carlisle, letters of invitation to such friends as he desired to receive, and to meet all the expenses attendant on these last and extensive preparations, Mrs. Marsh was empowered to draw for unlimited sums upon the City bankers. On the momentous day when the long-expected return of her beloved master was to take place, Mrs. Marsh had not forgotten to observe that exactly one *twelve-month had elapsed* since Richard Stanhope had parted with his betrothed in the fourth storey studio of No. 9, the only portion of the house which he had desired to remain untouched. It was some hours in advance of the time set for the arrival of Sir Richard and his bride that an imperative summons was heard at the street door.

Mrs. Marsh was called upon by the footman in attendance to meet a stately-looking grave gentleman, who, without any preliminary greeting, placed in her hands the following missive, signed and written in the well-known hand of Sir Richard Stanhope:—"Mrs. Marsh,—For all your past fidelity and good service I bid God bless you. The time has come when we must part, and that without a word or meeting. My banker, the bearer of this, has full and imperative instructions to dismiss and pay off all the people you have engaged, and to requite them fully. When they are gone, I also require you to leave the

house, No. 9, Stanhope Street, before nightfall. Mr. ——, my banker, will henceforth pay you two hundred pounds a year for your life, the first payment to be made in advance on the day you receive this, but you are hereby CHARGED solemnly to leave everything in the house precisely as it is when you receive this order; to ask no questions, make no enquiries, and never again to come to, or near, No. 9, Stanhope Street. Signed—*Richard Stanhope.*” Such was the missive, under the authority of which Mrs. Marsh—with a countenance white as that of the dead, eyes red with weeping, and an almost broken heart—summoned and dismissed the crowd of attendants with which she had filled the house. All of them received handsome douceurs at the hands of the silent stranger, besides the wages due to them, and when at last the unhappy housekeeper had packed her few belongings and summoned a cab to drive her away from what she had for so many years considered to have been her home, the grave official after simply bowing his head to her by way of leave-taking passed out of the house, himself closing and locking the door behind him, and putting the key in his pocket.

Before parting with the heart-stricken housekeeper, the silent stranger had placed an envelope in her hands containing, as he informed her, the first half-year’s payment of her annuity, and full directions for all future claims on the same. Mechanically receiving this, together with the sad and remorseless dismissal of her late beloved master, Mrs. Marsh directed the cab driver to proceed at once to a pleasant suburban terrace. There she expected to find at least the one friend in the world who alone was capable of consoling her for her strange and incomprehensible dismissal; this person was no other than her young and only daughter, of whom it may now be necessary to speak in some detail.

Mrs. Marsh was the widow of a celebrated artist, an Academician, and an intimate friend of Richard Stanhope’s father. Her marriage had proved an unfortunate one. Her husband, though a man of brilliant talents, was a dissipated spendthrift, and having received a fatal blow in a drunken brawl, he died, and left his poor wife and one baby girl penniless, and totally unprovided for. At this juncture the elder Stanhope kindly offered his friend’s desolate widow a home, and the charge of his own motherless boy of twelve years of age. Mrs. Marsh agreed to accept the position of *housekeeper* in the Stanhope residence; but at the request of her brother, a professor of languages, and superintendent of a Ladies’ College, she allowed him to adopt and bring up her

little one as his own. Under the severe *regime* of her uncle, Ethel Marsh had grown up to be a beautiful and accomplished young woman. A fine linguist, a splendid musician and delightful singer, her uncle, who had destined his gifted young niece to be a teacher, had often urged her mother to give up what he called the *degradation of service*, and make a home with her daughter, whose talents he confidently believed would be amply sufficient for the support of both mother and daughter. To all this Mrs. Marsh's fidelity and affection for her "young master," as she had ever regarded him since his father's death, made her turn a deaf ear. It was only when she found that Stanhope had resolved to marry the fair model who had been sitting for him, that her purpose of living and dying with her beloved employer was shaken. With all a woman's instinct she had penetrated all too deeply beneath the exterior of the said model, to assure herself that however devotedly she could live and die in the service of Richard Stanhope, she neither could nor would share that devotion with his intended wife. This resolve was all the more strengthened when she received from him tidings of his good fortune, his heirship of a baronetcy, and elaborate directions for preparing his London house with all imaginable splendour for the reception of his bride. It was at that point that Mrs. Marsh agreed with her talented daughter, then just in her twenty-first year, to take such lodgings as they two could share together, the mother to keep her dear girl's house whilst she pursued her vocation as a successful and greatly admired teacher. "I will prepare *his* house," she said, "in all care and fidelity. I will myself procure a suitable substitute for such poor service as I have been able to render him, but I cannot continue under the same roof with *her* whom he has chosen to share this home." Although the sudden and startling dismissal of all the servants she had engaged, including herself, only anticipated—(it might be by a few days or weeks)—her own removal to her daughter's home, the scene and manner of that dismissal was so terrible, so incomprehensible, and filled her mind with such an awful sense of dread and nameless fear that, despite Ethel's warm welcome and earnest endeavours to tranquillise her unhappy mother's mind, Mrs. Marsh, after a sleepless night, no sooner saw her young daughter set off to her duties as teacher at the College, where she knew she would be detained the entire day, than she hurried away to linger near the scene of her banishment, in the vague but vain hope that she might yet see *him*, and learn something of the dreadful mystery that seemed to enshroud the being who, next to her God, was the object of her supremest worship on earth. For many days the sorrowing woman wandered round and about the deserted house, thinking she might

discover some clue to the secret of her still beloved master's whereabouts. It was only on the seventh night of her hitherto fruitless wanderings that she was rewarded, by noticing a faint gleam of light shining through the window of the studio on the fourth floor. "Great heaven!" she murmured to herself, "then he has returned! Oh, if I could but see or speak to him!" Her wish was vain, for though she—the faithful one—watched and waited through the livelong night, walking now on this side and now on that of the street, but ever keeping the house and the dimly-lighted window in view, it was only at the first peep of dawn, when she found on one of her weary rounds that the light was extinguished, that the least sign of human presence within the building was manifested.

It was after three more days of occasional and most miserable hours of watching, and pacing both back and front round the house, that Mrs. Marsh saw the object of her deep solicitude issue forth from the back garden gate, attired as we have described him in the last chapter, his face concealed by the darkness of a winter's evening, but long curls of unkempt hair, white as snow, streaming down on either side, from beneath his heavy dark flap hat. He carried on his arm a large basket, and, fortunately for the anxious observer, as he turned in the lane on which the gardens of the houses opened, away from her, she was enabled to follow him at a little distance unperceived, and thus to gain a knowledge of his singular proceedings. Traversing with hurried and apparently faltering steps, many lanes and alleys, the poor, bending, swaying form reached a set of petty, ill lighted shops in a narrow street of the Borough. Entering one of these, a baker's, the watcher lost sight of her charge for a few moments, but presently she saw him emerge with the basket on his arm filled with small loaves of bread. These he carried until he came to one of the foulest and most foetid alleys of a wretched neighbourhood. Advancing to some of the open doors of dark passages, he hastily drew one, and sometimes two, of his loaves of bread, and placed them on the steps, or just within the doors. Whenever he passed a cellar wherein some humble vender of sticks, shoes, or small trifles kept a shop, he invariably threw a loaf down and passed rapidly on.

Three times during the evening and night he purchased a fresh stock of loaves from wretched little shops, evidently kept open for night sales, and three times the basket was emptied in the same secret way. Sometimes he entered the dark passages of great loathsome looking tenement houses with a full basket, coming out again in view of the hidden watcher with the basket empty. Sometimes he stopped beside some crouching beggar, sitting or sleeping on a

doorstep; here he invariably deposited a loaf, and then moved hastily away. For six dreadful nights the unhappy woman followed and watched the same procedure, and then when, according to custom, an hour or two after midnight the wanderer returned to his garden gate to re-enter his own premises. Mrs. Marsh for the first time intercepted him. Falling at his feet, with showers of tears she implored him to let her come in and live there again; wait on him in any way he would please to allow her, promising solemnly never to ask him any questions, to interrupt him, or attempt to interfere with his habits; but yet—

“Oh, master, master, let me in! and let me be your slave.”

She went in that night, and taking possession of her cold offices and little housekeeper’s room once more, for five years she lived there, furnishing him with his breakfast of bread and milk, his dinner of potatoes or boiled vegetables, and his midnight meal, only of bread and milk. He never spoke to her save in low monosyllables, and she never broke her pledge by remonstrance or question, nor did she follow again his *every* night’s woeful pilgrimage until the very evening referred to at the end of the last chapter.

It was all in vain that the good and loving Ethel besought her mother again and again to renounce her infatuation, and come and share her own pleasant home.

“Had he been the rich, happy bridegroom for whom I prepared with such ceaseless care and high expectation,” said the devoted woman, “I would have left him to the enjoyment of all his good fortune without a sigh, but to leave him now, a helpless maniac, with only heart enough to bleed at every pore, and brain enough to plan out his own misery—oh, my child! I would sooner renounce my hopes of salvation; my heaven hereafter; even my fealty to God.”

“And your sorrowing child?” murmured poor Ethel.

But even at these pitiful words the devoted woman had no answer to make, save a deep sigh, and a silent inclination of her bowed head.

It was on a certain night, something more than five years after the return to her master’s weird house, that Mrs. Marsh felt a strange, unaccountable, and irresistible impulse to put on her bonnet and shawl in haste, and, despite a heavy fog and drizzling winter rain, to issue forth once more, dodging and following the footsteps of her unhappy charge. Up to the time when the chimes of an ancient Borough church sounded out the midnight hour, the weird phantom-like man, now well known to the midnight prowlers of the wretched quarters he visited, as “Dirty Dick,” kept up his accustomed round of

bread purchase and loaf depositing on steps, at street doors, in cellars, and entrances to dens of wretchedness. Turning a street corner as if to end that night's pilgrimage, both he and his devoted follower were arrested by the sound of loud and bitter sobs, apparently from the voices of children.

As both pedestrians paused to listen, they heard a childish voice, in a loud tone, and evidently half choked with crying, say, "Oh, sister, sister, do open the cellar door. Perhaps, as the story book says, if you will but open it, God may come in and help us." Immediately following upon this, a double-leaved cellar door opening on the pavement was thrown back, and by the light of a dim fallow candle burning within, the pale and tear-stained faces of two little children, a boy and a girl, were seen looking eagerly up through the opening. "Yes, my children, God has heard you, and he will come in," Mrs. Marsh heard the voice of Richard Stanhope saying, and that in something like his old tone, as he made his way to the entrance of the cellar, on the steps of which were bundles of matches, tallow candles, and firewood arranged as if for sale. As Stanhope descended these steps Mrs. Marsh placed herself close beside the entrance, and listening intently heard the following colloquy:—

"Oh, dear sir," cried a childish voice, "are you, then, God; and are you come to help us?"

"I am not God, my children," was the reply, "only sent by Him. Tell me what is the matter?"

"Oh, sir, sir!" cried another, and an older voice, but still broken by sobs, "look there, there, upon the bed in the corner, sir, there is mother, and she has been so ill, sir, for many days, and now I can't make her answer—and—and—I fear she is dead, sir. Oh, mother, mother! do speak to us."

"Hush, my little one," resumed the voice of the man; "truly, truly, your poor mother is dead, but I am come, and will care for you; there, there, don't cry so. Good heavens!" he murmured, after a long pause, in which it seemed as if he had been examining the dead face of one who lay on a heap of straw in the corner. "What do I see? Can it be possible?" Then in a louder tone he said, addressing the girl, the elder of the two children, "Tell me, dear, where you come from, and what is your name."

"My name, sir, is Eva," replied the girl, "and my little brother's name is Carlo. We used to be called Balfour when we lived at home, but papa went away and left us, mamma said, and so she went away with us, and a gentleman

called Sir Charles, but after we came to London, Sir Charles left us, too, and poor mamma went about begging, I think, but, oh, I don't know how it was, only we were often hungry and cold, and had nowhere to go, until a man put us in here to sell things, and, and, I don't know where he is, or what to do."

Sobs and choking cries from both children followed, broken by Stanhope's voice in low and husky accents, saying, "Be of good cheer, my children; I have come, and I will take care of you—fear nothing, for to-night you shall come home with me. I knew your father, and your mother, too, and I will take care of you, and to-morrow I will have your poor mother's body given to the authorities, and properly buried. Come, my children."

"Let me help you, master," cried Mrs. Marsh, descending the steps and at once facing the sad and sorrowful group.

Though startled at first by her sudden appearance, Richard Stanhope never asked his devoted follower how or why she came there. It was enough that God had indeed come, in the form of his ministering angels.

Whilst Mrs. Marsh helped the weeping children up the cellar stairs Sir Richard followed, carefully closing the cellar doors after him; then, each leading one of the sobbing orphans by the hand, they took the shortest way home; very soon after the little ones were regaled with some warm milk and bread, and, laid to rest in Mrs. Marsh's bed, they sobbed themselves to sleep in their new home of No.9 Stanhope Street.

CHAPTER XII.—CONCLUSION.

IT was a sad and pitiful revelation disclosed by the official inquiry concerning the events of the night recorded in our last chapter. As the reader may have already divined by the names and brief history given in the cellar by the children whose mother lay dead in the corner of that woeful place, those children were the orphans of Stanhope's friend and fellow student in art, Reginald Balfour. The fate of the unhappy Maddalena, the neglected and ill-educated wife of Balfour, was precisely that which has befallen many another hapless wife, unfaithful to her marriage vows, adored one hour by the seducer, deserted the next. In London, whither she had been brought by her destroyer, she had insisted on keeping under her own charge her two little children, whom she passionately loved, while her temporary *protector*, weary of them and jealous of her divided affections, was equally determined that they should be sent away somewhere—anywhere—removed from intrusion on his selfish gratification in the society of the object of his fleeting fancy. All this was learned by a letter partly written by the wretched woman and found in the pocket of her ragged gown. It was addressed to her foster mother, Madame Baillie, to whom she seemed to be in the course of appealing, but as that letter was neither finished nor directed, no one save Sir Richard Stanhope could have known the party for whom it was really designed. This fragment of writing and the testimony of the poor little children being the sum of the information procurable at the inquest, a verdict of “found dead from natural causes” was returned.

To place the poor wanderer's remains, at the end of her miserable career, in a nameless grave, and open up the tender mercies of the workhouse to the forsaken orphans, was all that now remained to be done for the once beautiful but ill-fated wife of Reginald Balfour.

Both these duties were at once quietly undertaken by a strange gentleman, who appeared in court on behalf of Sir Richard Stanhope, and for some time was addressed as his man of business, but who, without giving any clue as to his identity, at the close of the proceedings led away the two little pale and trembling orphans, with the assurance that a home had been offered to them, and a provision found by which they would be well cared for.

O wonderful, glorious, and divine spirit of pure, merciful, and unselfish love!

The anguish, suffering—nay, the insanity that had eaten into the mind and brain of poor Richard Stanhope, under the pressure of a grief beyond mortal power to endure, was medicined into a real heart cure by the all-omnipotent power of love.

The gentleman who appeared at the inquest on the body of poor Maddalena Balfour, with trimmed short, white, curled hair, a very pale but noble and classic face, white hands, fine linen, and a suit of plain but modern fashion, declined to give any other name but Stanhope—"a relative of the baronet of that name." And who that conversed with this refined and attractive gentleman could have identified him with the wild, weird, unwashed spectre of No. 9, Stanhope Street? the historical "Dirty Dick," whose real and most terrible history is, to this day, the mystery of the place he inhabited. And yet the identities are one and the same, though the metempsychosis which transformed the doleful apparition of slums and alleys, the pitiful bread-thrower of the hungry and wretched, into the modern gentleman, was the angel of love for a dead friend and his miserable wife and children. Meantime, the instruments which effected the change were good Mother Marsh, who, with silent unostentatiousness, prepared hot baths, neat clothes, laid out for acceptance, and a taciturn lackey, who, without orders, by cutting, trimming, and rehabilitating his poor master, transformed the still historical though mystical "Dirty Dick," without one word said, but all under the saving and redeeming influence of LOVE, into Sir Richard Stanhope, Baronet.

It was on the evening of the day after the inquest that Sir Richard Stanhope, having returned home in a hired cab, accompanied by a stranger whom he himself showed into a hall parlour, summoned Mrs. Marsh to attend him in the drawing-room.

"Dear friend," he said, tenderly seating her in a chair opposite his own, "since we have undertaken the care of these little orphans, and they are quite too young to be sent out to the cold mercies of schools or strangers, I have resolved to train and educate them myself to the best advantage I can, and so for this purpose I intended to hire an accomplished governess for them. Not knowing myself where to find the *rara avis* I desired to procure, I have taken the liberty of calling on your brother, Professor Marsh, at the Ladies' College, in L—— Street. He was kind enough to direct my choice to one of the most accomplished teachers of the day, and by way of saving you all trouble, dear Mother Marsh, I have brought her along with me this evening. And, now, all I

hope is that you may approve of my choice; and so, to put the matter beyond doubt, I'll just introduce her to you at once."

So saying, and without waiting for a word of reply from the pale and trembling housekeeper, Sir Richard abruptly left the room. Returning again in a few minutes, he was accompanied by a young lady who, throwing back her veil and disclosing the sweet and gracious features of Ethel Marsh, was instantly clasped in the arms and pressed to the heart of her deeply moved mother.

From that hour every scene, room, and object in NO.9, Stanhope Street, was changed.

The banqueting hall, with its hideous freight of dead fruit, flowers, and plants, was cleared, and filled with books, musical instruments, and all the appliances of a library study and schoolroom. Charming apartments were fitted up for the little adopted ones, and their radiantly happy and accomplished governess. "Dear Mother Marsh's" premises were enlarged and improved, although used now no longer as a retreat for sorrow and heart-break, but simply as the house of call for servants, children, and friends, until the meal times and delightful evening ceremonies assembled together the entire family party. On these occasions, Carlo and Eva, both gifted with lovely voices, joined their accomplished governess in such exquisite musical selections, as served to give the entranced listeners a foretaste of the harmonies of higher realms than those of earth. But whilst "Dear Mother Marsh" sat in their midst, and listened and knitted, until she kept dropping her stitches as fast as her tears of unspeakable happiness, where all this while was the once too famous but woeful object, known as "Dirty Dick?"

Gone! lost from the public gaze for ever! but not so his work; for in his place, almoners and missionaries brought to slums and alleys, orders for work, entrance tickets to the sick for hospitals, and many a gratuity from an unknown friend to the poor and comfortless. As to the children of poor Reginald Balfour—the careless husband, the atheist, all unconscious of, and indifferent to, the chances of a possible life of compensation or retribution hereafter—they grew up in intellectual power and spiritually religious aspirations. Eva was a splendid musician, a sweet singer, and a highly intuitional spirit. Carlo was by choice a student in the grand science of engineering, and both so loved, almost worshipped, their "father," as they had learned to call Sir Richard, that the ties between them of mutual affection were

deeper far than those of blood or kindred. No. 9 was completely metamorphosed in every part. It had become a sweet, pleasant, and refined home; "Dear Mother Marsh," ever in their midst, with her kind, tender voice, directing and giving orders, which Eva sprang to obey, was the guardian spirit of the family; but there was still one more, who played her gentle but deeply influential part, in that household.

This was Ethel Marsh, once the governess, now the assistant housekeeper, friend, and second mother of the entire family.

"Where is Ethel?" "What does Ethel say?" "What does she desire?" were words on every lip. One more, and that the last scene that we can now dwell upon in this weird but o'ertrue history we will introduce, and then bid farewell to No. 9, Stanhope Street.

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"Ethel! my own dear and beloved Ethel! my saviour, my physician, alike of mind and body, oh, say—tell me that you will be my wife!"

Such were the words of Richard Stanhope on the eve of the entire family's departure for Sir Richard's Italian palazzo at Florence one summer evening some three years after his adopted children had found a home in his heart and house.

"Come with me, Richard, up into your studio," replied the lady, with deep earnestness.

Entered once more into the old familiar scene of our narrative's first commencement, the fourth floor studio of the quondam artist, Sir Richard seated his fair companion opposite the stand on which still stood unframed, but covered with the dust and grime of past years, the full length picture of the terrible "Clytemnestra," the raised dagger in her beautiful hand, the classic head and form of the royal murderer matching strangely with the fixed resolute glance of her who dared to do a deed unequalled alike for cruelty and treachery.

"Ethel, my beloved," said Sir Richard, calmly, "you have heard from our mother, I know, the story of my insane adoration for the original of that picture—a woman's form with a devil's heart. You have heard of my betrothal to her, and my intended marriage on the day when this, my house, was fitted up to receive her as my bride. But that which no mortal ear has yet heard, was this: Three months prior to the expiration of the year, when

I was, according to compact, to claim her as my betrothed, I went secretly to Carlisle to watch over and, as I thought, to protect her against the wiles of an artful, designing brother. As I was an entire stranger in the city, to avoid the necessity of going to an hotel, where I might become known, I had written to a fellow artist I had become intimate with in Paris—Jean Montvall. This young and rising artist had been engaged by a rich amateur residing in the vicinity of Carlisle to paint a number of pictures for him, on subjects designed by his eccentric patron: As I was informed that Montvall occupied lodgings in the city, I had written to him and received an answer, inviting me to hire a very quiet and private apartment in the same building with himself. It was immediately after my arrival that my Parisian friend invited me to accompany him to a strange scene in which he expected to find a subject for his art. ‘My patron,’ he said, ‘is a singular character, and has a remarkable passion for the horrible. For some time he has been waiting to have me sketch him a scene from the French guillotine, and a decapitated head newly severed. Most happily for Paris, but unfortunately, as he deems, for himself, no execution has taken place during his stay in the French capital. Just as he was planning with me how to *rig up* a dummy head, guillotine, and appurtenances, he came to inform me a few days ago that an execution was to take place this morning, when a woman was to be hanged for the murder of her husband. “I have bargained with the students of the St. M—— Medical College,” my patron added, “for a fine, tragic scene, which I will pay you any fancy sum you may demand to sketch.* They have fixed me up an ideal guillotine; I have succeeded in getting the surgeons to secure me the body of the wretched woman executed this morning; the decapitated head will be your subject, and, placed on a pole, will be ready to tax your skill to-night.” Now,’ continued Montvall, ‘though the sum is very tempting to a poor fellow like me for sketching this ghastly scene, to be got up and enacted to-night, I must confess I am coward enough to shrink from facing it alone. Will you, my friend, accompany me to the anatomical lecture-room? That is all I ask of you.’”

“Ethel, my dearest,” added Richard Stanhope huskily, “I hate to repeat with my lips a secret that has never before passed them, and to pour into ears as pure as yours the remainder of my hideous story. Enough, that I was taken by my artist friend to the Anatomical School, where I saw the model of the imaginary guillotine, a decapitated female form stretched out beneath a white

* A veritable fact in a veritable history.—ED. U.U.

sheet on an adjoining bench, a student, dressed as a masked executioner, axe in hand: holding up a real decapitated woman's head by its long fair waving tresses of gold, whilst the mock executioner cried out in bombastic French, 'Behold the head of the murderer, ADINA MORANI, put to death this day for the murder of her lawful husband, Jacopo Morani, of ——.' At this point I saw no more, heard no more. I KNOW beyond a peradventure that heart, mind, brain, all, all, gave way. I *died* to the Richard Stanhope I had been, and after many long weeks of raving lunacy I became a new spirit in the old body, but a worn out wreck, a miserable, woeful, sham of a man, with no thought but to live, because I must, and to do something in the shape of feeding those more hungry and miserable than myself. Whether this state was, as I now think, the obsession of some spirit even more miserable than myself, or a mania of my own soul, induced by agony and horror, I can never quite determine. I think, myself, we may live many lives in one body, and yet, by the force of circumstances and outward impressions, our minds may become so changed that the former individuality of our soul may be lost, though our body remains the same. Be this as it may, I believe that I had but one ray of reason during many weeks of madness, and this was when the doctor in attendance upon me informed me that the ghostly tragedy (the representation and memory of which had so fearfully affected me) had been enacted by a woman, wife of a billiard player who had passed himself off as her brother in order to attract custom by her beauty. That the wretched woman having in prospect a much more wealthy marriage with a rich dupe, had, with the aid of her equally wicked mother, put her husband to death. The mother had escaped to the Continent, added the doctor, the daughter confessed her crime on the night before her execution.

"What more need be said, my Ethel, to explain the nature of the life I led? Can you wonder that all that makes up the sane man had died within me, or rather was crushed beneath the weight of a horrible memory—a nightmare, under the spell of which I lived like an automaton, moved by the springs of vital motion into walking, talking, and actions with which will and reason played no part. From this condition still another shock revived me, woke me, and brought me back to life, or, as it now seems to me, I was born again as a man—born on the night when I saw my unhappy friend, Reginald Balfour's widow, lying still and cold, her life and sufferings ended, and took away from that piteous scene the children, the two blessed little ones whom I have now, with your help, made my joy, my pride, my very own. Oh, Ethel! will you not

be their loving mother, even as you have been their guardian angel?"

"I will, Richard, dearest, and long-suffering one, I will; but on one condition only," replied Ethel. "We must leave this house—we, our children and mother—and this city of evil and deception behind us."

"Even so, my love. In my beautiful Italian home we will all begin a new and blessed life, never more embittered by one painful memory. Great Heaven! with wife, mother, and children, all true, good, and sinless, loved and loving, what more can I ask of Heaven except pity and forgiveness for all who have wronged their own souls in wronging others?"

No. 9, Stanhope Street, became a deserted house within a few weeks after the period of the above interview, and was finally dismantled and sold. But though the legendary and unsolved mystery of "Dirty Dick's" existence is still connected with that place and street, who that ever saw good Sir Richard Stanhope in his beautiful Italian palace, surrounded by his sweet wife, tender mother, his grateful adopted children, and two or three other younger and smaller loved ones, would have ever connected that noble and beneficent friend of hurrianity with the weird and terrible MYSTERY OF 9, STANHOPE STREET.